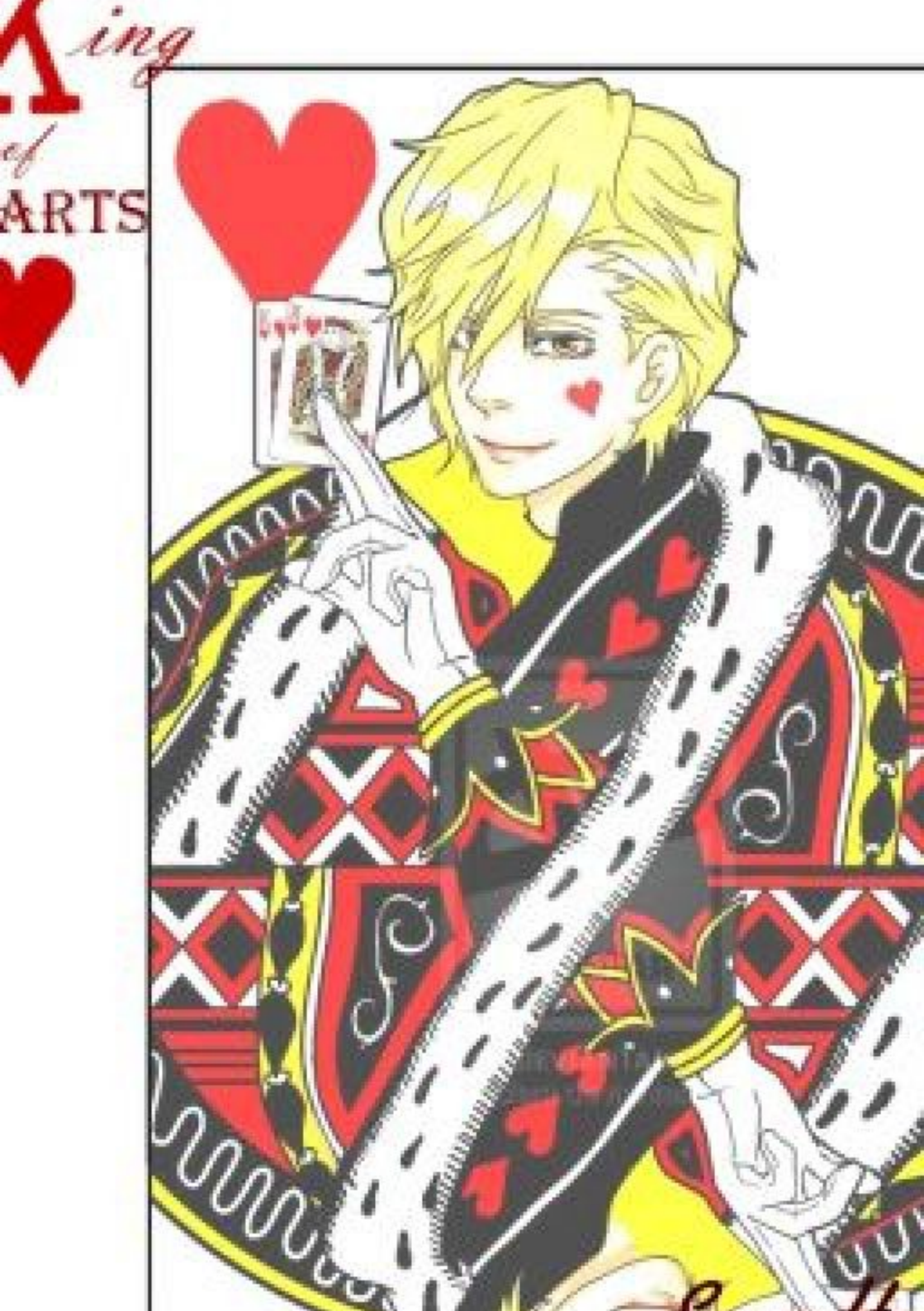
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King of Hearts

By SevenHart

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Chapter 1

King of Hearts Ch. 1

Waking up in the morning had to be one of my least favorite things to do. Being drawn back into my regular life from dreams with a tall, tanned, blonde guy (who's hair was constantly changing) was not one of my favorite things to do. The only thing I was ever able to recall from my dreams was his name, Jack. I'm not sure why his name's Jack. Honestly, I think it should be Felix meaning happy in Latin. He always seemed cheerful in my dreams. I even had one where he was trying to fix the sink. I woke up crying from that one. I didn't know why or for what because it ended like all the others. He kisses me and leans forward to say, "I will find you." Of course

when I first had this dream when I was around five my mom started freaking out and saying that I was possessed by demons. Not that I was. A priest had come later that day to prove that. What he had said, though, had made it seem like I did have a demon somewhere and I was just hiding it. My mom gave me up for adoption after that. Then I landed in one home after another until I turned eighteen. I was lucky that my mom had left me some money in a deposit that she hadn't touched. So I got my own place and went to school. I even got a degree. Now I'm a high school teacher, a creative writing teacher to be exact. I work on the newspaper with the students and they seem to like me well enough...

Throwing my arm over my eyes, I groaned and sat up unhappily. Letting my arm fall, I noticed that it was still two hours before school opened for the teachers to get in. Tiredly, I stood up and just stared at my wall for a while before I stretched and yawned. A quick shower was in order and after that a couple cups of coffee. After the coffee, I would eat a snack bar and maybe chill on the couch before I went to work. I usually had lesson plans to do but luckily, I had

turned them in yesterday. Even my students knew that I didn't want to do a lot in the morning but they kept my spirits up by sometimes bringing me a cup of coffee or a small treat. Not something that happened to every teacher, let me tell you. Mrs. Withers was complaining about my attitude just the other day and had scoffed at my scores. Then again, I actually had the top scores in the school. I didn't even know why I was worrying. Agitated with my slow pace, I hopped in the shower after starting the coffee pot. With surprising speed, I was out and in my work clothes (a polo shirt and slacks with my favorite boots) tinkering around my kitchen. My apartment was right by the school so I was able to walk there everyday. Plus I intended to start Shakespeare today.

Happily reminded of the fact, I started humming. Grabbing my bag, I pulled off the wrapper to my snack bar and threw it in the trash. Locking the door with my breakfast in my mouth, I started to make my way to the school. I had been doing pretty good with getting there recently. I had always been there early but now I got there before all the other teachers. Then again I should considering the fact that I was

living by the school. Finishing off my bar with a crunch, I swallowed it and walked in the front doors. The front hall was still closed but the library should be open. It always was with Ms. Hallow in there. She was my favorite person here and we often had lunch together. Making my way there, I walked to the library and blinked astounded. It was closed. She was always here earlier. I even considered it a law against nature to be here before she was. Shocked, I glared at the door before I sighed and made my way back to the front hall. I was on the second floor of A hall but that didn't stop me from stomping my way there. It wasn't like anyone was here anyway. I angrily jammed my keys into my classroom door and opened it.

Muttering curses under my breath, I was about to throw my bag on my desk when I saw it. It was the King of Hearts from a deck of cards on a student's desk. It hadn't been there when I left, Friday, so why was it here now? Confused, I set my bag on the floor and contemplated the card. It had the usual K in the upper left hand corner but the cover art was unusual. It had a man covered with a black cloth but

his arms came out from beneath it. His arms were bent towards himself and his hands held swords that crossed at the hilt. He had a blindfold on that covered most of his face. Although his short blonde hair didn't escape my notice, or the fact that he was tan. If anything he looked remarkably like Felix. Turning it over to see the deck art, I only found a heart with a single word going through the heart like an arrow: Victory. Frowning, I turned back to the face of it and examined it for anything else. Nothing seemed to pop out at me, so I put it in my desk and started to get my classroom ready.

Putting booklets of Shakespeare on my desk seemed to brighten my day a little. I didn't especially like the playwright but I did like the feeling of moving on. It felt fresh and hopefully, I could make it fun with clips I had found off of the internet. Humming again, I looked at my work and smiled. It was nice, neat, and in order. Booting up my desktop, I looked around and made sure nothing was hiding from me. Positive that nothing was there, I set my bag on the floor under my desk and logged in. I was actually singing under my breath at this point and was gaining volume

when the principal walked in to greet me. He was an older man, getting on in his years. Wispy gray hair crowned his head in an attempt to hid his age. He was a small man under my height by quite a few inches.

"Ms. Towers, how are you this morning?" he asked visibly pleased at my early arrival. Then again he was always happy from what I knew.

"I'm perfectly fine, Mr. Chandler. How are you," I answered smiling at him. He had given me my job with the inclusion that I would come to work early. So far I had made sure that I was here by the time he had indicated in my contract.

"I just peachy. I brought some tea the wife made. Would you like some?" he inquired hopefully and I looked around my room. Everything was in order and no one would exactly come in.

"I would love some. How is Mrs. Chandler? She has gotten over her cough right?" I asked politely and he nodded as I locked my door again.

"She got over her cough but now it seems that she's complaining of some sort of leg pain. I plan to take her in this weekend if it didn't get any worse," he informed me and I grimaced. Mrs. Chandler was always complaining of some sort of illness. My only guess was the principal enjoyed taking care of her or else he wouldn't take care of her at all.

"I hope it isn't serious," I said lightly and he chuckled. I glanced at him surprised. He hardly ever found anything amusing, even if he did look pleased all the time.

"It's probably about as serious as her 'stomach bug' last month. I'm sure you remember it," he added and I agreed wholeheartedly. I did remember it. It was also the month that I met Ms. Hallow. A month full of surprises and a few new acquaintances. One of them being Mrs. Withers. A woman I could have done completely without in my life. A drama queen if I had ever heard of one but she was still in my department so I had to deal with her.

I was distracted from my thoughts by the waving motion of a hand within my field of vision. Dorothy

Hallow was throwing her arm around like it was made of paper, trying to get my attention. I smiled at her in acknowledgement and she beamed with relief. I signaled that I would talk to her later and she nodded, grinning.

"You're a friend of Ms. Hallow?" he interrogated.

"Yes I am," I said a bit to defensively because he looked at me with a raised eyebrow.

"I was just asking because she looks a bit like she needs a light in her life," he replied and I tried not to grimace. It was true that Dorothy dressed like a Goth but she was one of those happy Goths that loved the color black like a religion. In fact, every time I wore black she would start to quote Poe. Not something you want quoted to you but I found it a mixture of exasperating and endearing.

"She does need someone who'll dress her in more colors I agree. I even got her to wear a bright red bracelet but that was because it was the color of blood..." I trailed off and I heard him chuckle.

"I'm sure the tea can wait, Ms. Towers. You should probably go and try to convince our librarian to wear yellow or green," he told me and I turned to him. He was smiling with a look that one could only call paternal. He obviously thought of me like a daughter and I couldn't help but feel a bit guilty that I was going to go talk to Dorothy.

"Are you sure? I can always talk to Ms. Hallows during lunch," I reminded him and he held up his hand.

"Have fun, Ms. Towers," he rebutted and I bit my lip. He waved me off and I followed his instructions and made a bee line towards the library. The light was on by the time I got there and Dorothy was already on the computer checking her email.

"Can you believe that this guy already has the tattoo that I wanted? It took me forever to find that one and now he's just slithered his way in and snapped it up," she complained as a welcome and I tried not to smile. Her version of forever consisted of a thousand Google pages and an enny-minny-mainny-moe selection. So all I could do was try not to grin.

Nobody else, I knew would even think of doing that. She, of course, had done it three times and so far they've all come out pretty good. She also keeps her body in shape but that's because she likes seeing the looks she gets when she runs down the street in her tank top and too low sweatpants. She's done it all the way to my apartment before too. She just showed up all sweaty and grinned.

"You're crazy, you know that?" I asked and she laughed.

"Thanks! I always knew that I would get a good sentence that described our relationship. That's crazy!" She exclaimed and grinned at me. I shook my head and leaned against the table.

"Had another dream about our favorite blonde?" She asked and I looked at her sharply. She was smirking under her natural black hair.

"Maybe," I answered evasively and she snickered.

"It was probably some hot dream with him putting his..." she started and I glared at her. She knew better than that but she loved testing my limits.

"It was the one where he was fixing the sink, thank you very much," I finished and she tried her hardest not to laugh. It wasn't very hard because she started laughing a few seconds later.

"That's what you said when I asked you last time!" She shrieked with mirth and I glowered at her. I had told her about my dreams on a whim and now she thinks that I'm destined to marry him or something.

"You know it's great," she said calming down and I began to smile. I knew it was great. It always had been. Luckily, the arrival bell saved me from answering how much I liked it and I said good bye (which she waved away with a black webbed hand). Stepping with a much lighter step, I made my way towards my classroom to welcome my early students.

Don't forget to vote. Thanks!

Chapter 2

King of Hearts Ch. 2

By the time I had gotten to my classroom, Nil was standing outside of my room reading his book of the day. Nil was a quiet kid with a mind that made me smile. He was one of my favorites...not that teachers are supposed to have favorites.

"Nil, how are you today?" I greeted smiling and he closed his book with a soft thump.

"I'm fine. I have a headache though," He murmured and I frowned. Nil got terrible migraines that came with an anger that would shake a demon to it's knees.

"Is there anything I can do?" I inquired hopefully and he looked at me. His serious face seemed to examine mine with an intelligence that would probably beat mine by far. Then, it dropped and he shook his head.

"No, but thank you," He muttered and I nodded. Letting him in the room before me, he sat down in his usual seat by the window and started reading again. I went and sat down at my computer, opening my drawer to get Nil's mom's phone number just in case, I sat the King of Hearts staring at me again. His blindfold was gone and his eyes were open. They were a shocking white that made me slightly uncomfortable to look at. Plus, his face seemed like something de Vinci would sculpt...If de Vinci put tattoos on his sculptures. Lines came out of his eyes and twisted down his cheeks to his jaw and then made a little heart on either side of his cheeks. It was oddly attractive. I picked it up to examine it better when I heard a soft cough behind me. Whirling around in my chair, Nil stood there watching me examine the card.

"What do you think? Is Felix a good name for him?" I recovered and Nil took the card. He seemed to search for something that I couldn't even begin to understand.

"He should be called Jack," he mumbled and I gasped involuntarily. Startled his face shot up and stared at me.

"Sorry, I just...it reminded me of someone. Why do you think he should be called Jack? He's a King after all," I asked and he frowned.

"He looks like a Jack," he shrugged and I nodded numbly. Handing it back to me, I put it back in the drawer.

"Anything you need?" I asked and he nodded.

"Can you call my mom to pick me up? She likes you," he affirmed and I hurriedly got out my phone. Dialing the number, I held the phone to my ear and waited for her to pick up.

"Hello?" a warm voice asked and I smiled. Mrs. Patton was always warm, nice, cheery...to me. I had heard that she could chew out a teacher for so much

as being rude. When she get's like that, I usually run away or at least say hello and then run.

"Good morning Mrs. Patton. How are you?" I answered politely and I heard her sigh.

"Not good. I'm guessing the Nil needs to be picked up?" She asked, tiredly.

"Yes, ma'am. Is there anything that I can help you with?" I offered looking at Nil. He was holding his head in his hands. A expression of agony was plastered on his face and I wanted to hug him.

"No but thank you for the offer. Could you send Nil down? I'll be there in a few seconds," she asked and I agreed quietly.

"Nil? Your mom wants you to go downstairs, okay?" I said softly and touched his hands gently. He slapped me away and I backed up carefully. He was angry from the pain and I could weep for him. He looked up suddenly, tears ran down his face and I hugged him. His arms wrapped around me and he sobbed into my shoulder. Slowly gripping his waist, I pulled him up and we walked made our way slowly

downstairs together. When we got there, we started towards the front. His tears were still falling on my shirt and I was still half supporting him but neither of us were going to stop. Mrs. Patton was waiting for us in the lobby and I gently handed him over to her. Her distress was plain but she thanked me and they left.

Getting back to my classroom, I noticed a shirt on my desk. It was a blue button down that looked like it wouldn't fit me but noticing the puddle that had accumulated on my shirt, I grabbed it and changed it in the bathroom. Oddly enough, it fit me like a glove. Perfect in every way. I was curious to see who had left me the shirt when a commotion had erupted in the hallway. Rushing out, I saw a ring of students around two boys. My worst nightmare, a fight. Pushing through the crowd, I grabbed one of them and tried to pull them apart. Just as my grip was slipping, another pair of hands grabbed him. Then I grabbed the other boy and the ring broke up. You could've heard the mutterings all the way to heaven but they went. The security guards had gotten there by that point and I handed my fighter over to Mr.

Hamilton. He nodded briskly and I looked up at my helper. I gasped, covering my hand with my mouth in shock. It was Jack. Two tattoos lined his cheeks and I saw hanging hearts, it was...Felix? Confused, I smiled at him tentatively pulling my hands down from my face.

"I'm sorry to meet you like this Ms...?" He rumbled and I blinked. His eyes were coal black or at least they seemed to be.

"Towers, Mina Towers. Thank you so much for helping me," I said and stuck out my hand. To my relief, he grinned and took it.

"Felix Victory at your service. I just did what I could, Ms. Towers," he answered honestly and twisted our hands so mine was facing up. With the air of an aristocrat, he bent down in a bow and kissed my hand.

"Well, you did quite a lot. I wouldn't have been able to keep them apart had it not been for you," I replied flustered. Nobody had treated me like a queen before and I didn't know if I liked if or not. "Are you a new teacher here?"

"Yes. I'm the music teacher. I heard that you had need of one?" he straightened up making the statement sound like a question.

"Yes! I've been trying to get my principal to hire one but he just didn't seem to find the right one! I didn't know he had hired," I exclaimed happily. This really was good news. Our staff had been really dull without a music teacher. Most of the ones I've met were...eccentric at best. Plus, Mr. Fortson was looking a bit lonely in the Arts department.

"Do you have any idea where my classroom is?" he questioned and I nodded. Pulling him along, I went downstairs and into the Arts building.

"Mr. Fortson! Mr. Fortson! You have a new choir teacher!" I yelled going in and dropping Mr. Victory's hand. I missed the feel of it.

"Ms. Towers! It's been what? Two days since I last saw you? I was beginning to wonder when you'd come see me!" a bright voice roared and out scampered Mr. Fortson. He was a big man with muscles lining his body and a rather boyish looking face to match. Today, he was wearing a paint

splattered t-shirt, a pair of splotched jeans and he refused to wear shoes except to drive.

"Mr. Fortson, this is Mr. Victory our new director. Mr. Victory, this is Mr. Fortson our art teacher....didn't you wear those clothes Friday? Please don't tell me that you stayed the entire weekend here again," I groaned and he looked sheepish.

"I don't know what you're talking about...I just stayed here for a few extra hours and...I'm starving!" he exclaimed and I sighed. I usually had to check up on him from time to time but usually the entrance of students interrupted his thought process. No one was there to see him over the weekend so I often found him like this.

"I have some lunch in my briefcase," Mr. Victory offered and I glanced at him confused. Yet, there it was hanging from his right hand and it was huge. I mean this briefcase was monstrous. I don't know how he carried it around! As I was ogling the offensive item, the two men started chatting and I had to pull my eyes away from it.

"What do you think, Ms. Towers?" Mr. Victory's voice said and I blinked. Staring up at him I saw that he wanted something from me so I said what was on my mind.

"How do you carry that around?" I asked and he seemed to fight back a smile.

"With the skill of a ninja. You didn't answer my question," he probed and I shrugged. I've been known to zone out every once in a while.

"I wasn't listening," I confessed and he laughed. It was a beautiful round sound with lots of notes in between. I could see why he was the music teacher.

"Well then that settles it. It seems that most people don't listen to us after all," he decided and I looked from one to the other. They seemed to get along remarkably well for two people who had just met. Shaking off the feeling that they had probably met before, I said my good byes and headed towards my classroom.

It had certainly been an adventurous morning that's for sure, I wondered to myself and opened my

classroom door. Nicky, Jackie, and Monica were already sitting at their desks chatting away and I noticed that three other desks had suddenly gained an extra pamphlet.

"I didn't know desks could grow booklets," I voiced and the three girls looked at each nervously. "Where are your booklets girls?"

"In our backpacks," Nicky said biting her lip.

"I see. Well, I'm glad because you're going to have to have those booklets for your homework tonight," I said the suggestion in my voice bluntly obvious. The click only nodded like drones and I sat behind my desk trying not to sigh. They never did listen to me. Then again...I saw Monica stand up looking at me, in the corner of my eye, and I made sure that I was checking papers when she went and gathered the three booklets from the other desks. When she got out of my view, I turned to my computer with a smile.

"Ms. Towers, have you seen the new music teacher? I heard he was a total hottie," Jackie spoke up and I saw that the three were crowded around me.

"I did see Mr. Victory," I replied trying not to blush. It didn't work because the three girls stared at me in awe.

"He has to be to make Ms. Towers blush!" Nicky hooted and I raised an eyebrow at her but it didn't have any effect because now they were talking to each other excitedly.

"Maybe you can ask him out!" Jackie exclaimed and I laughed.

"Sure, and then we'll get married and have two kids. A boy and a girl named Christopher and Bethany," I teased and a voice laughed behind them. Shocked, I looked up to see Mr. Victory chuckling behind the three. The trio stared at him in total shock and then practically ran back to their desks trying not to be too obvious that they were listening in.

"I came to say thank you but it seems that your students want us to get married," He stated still grinning and I shrugged. It wasn't my fault he came in at the wrong time but that didn't stop the flush from creeping up my cheeks.

"Well, you're welcome. I thought you had to get your room ready," I said avoiding the situation completely and he shrugged.

"The room's ready and nobody's there. My students probably won't get there until right before the bell rings," He grinned and I tried not to smile. It was true the music students had trouble appearing before the bell rang. He set his hands down on my desk and leaned forward easily. It was like he had no idea that it was almost inappropriate for him to be this close.

"Well, that's what happens when you're a new teacher," I responded amiably and he straightened up.

"You're a hard person to intimidate, Ms. Towers," he commented and I flashed a smiled at him. I had been told that ever since I was small. Then again bouncing from foster home to foster home, you learned that you can't be intimidated.

"Intimidated? I was sure that you were flirty with me, Mr. Victory," I answered and his grin widened.

"My, my. Are you saying that I would do such a thing?" He asked and I scoffed.

"Of course you would," I replied and right after I said that the bell to go to class rang. Bowing low, he said goodbye and left. Right after the door closed, I slouched slightly letting the nervous energy drain out of me.

"OH MY GOD! He was gorgeous!" Monica squealed and I turned to her slightly amazed. It took a lot to get a word out of her so this must have been interesting to watch.

"I completely agree. We all vote 10 for 10, Ms. Towers. Now you have to marry him," she nodded and I sighed. Something told me that they wouldn't give up. As my students slowly trickled in, the trio filled all of them in and I decided that the next time he came in my room with my students in the vicinity, I wouldn't flirt. Of course, it wouldn't do much good until he actually came in the room. When all my students were accounted for, I did attendance and stood up, ready for the lesson to begin. Just as I was about to speak the intercom beeped.

"Yes?" I called and a crackly voice that I knew as Mrs. Robinson came on.

"Ms. Towers? Could you send Jacob Fitzgerald to the office?" she asked.

""Of course, Jacob?" I added looking at the boy. He nodded and grabbed the office pass that I kept on a hook by the door.

"As I was about to say, We're starting Shakespeare. You have a choice. You can do Macbeth, Romeo and Juliet, or Julius Caesar. You're homework tonight is to write an essay about why you want to do it. However, I expect you to use the quotes within that booklet and it has to be turned in tomorrow. Now we're going to be watching a few clips from each movie and see which one you want," I instructed and started up the first clip of Romeo and Juliet. By the time that was over, I had a few students sleeping. Of course, they didn't know how loud Julius Caesar could be. I'll just go ahead and show the clip of him dying. Suppressing a smile, I hit play and the sound of Caesar dying could be heard throughout the room. Shocked people sat up and stared at the carnage in

sudden interest. This went on throughout the morning with different classes and by the time it was my lunchtime, I was ready for it.

Don't forget to vote! Thanks!

Chapter 3

King of Hearts Ch. 3

"So I've heard that you got it on with the new music teacher," Dorothy said to me as I sat at our table by the window. Our teacher's lounge was amazing compared to other schools'. Considering, we have a buffet everyday. We also have a huge lounge. Tables and couches littered the room along with a couple of snack machines.

"Yeah, sure. I got it on with him...in your dreams. And his name's Mr. Victory," I reprimanded and she scoffed.

"Oh yeah. You got it on with him. I bet you even thought about his..." she started and I put my hand over her mouth.

"You say it and I swear that I'll put a knife in your mattress," I threatened and her eyes widened. I NEVER threatened people. It wasn't in my nature but this guy...

"So you did think about it! Man, you got it bad," she snickered and I glared at her.

"What does she have? I hope she's not sick," Mr. Victory said from behind me and Dorothy snorted into her coke.

"Yeah. She's real sick alright. Sick on lo..." she began before I interrupted.

"Ms. Hallows, this is Mr. Victory. Mr. Victory, this is Ms. Hallows," I introduced them hurriedly and he looked amused as he sat at our table.

"Mina! Our director has the firmest hand in the entire school! He was able to make those lazy student sing today! It even sounded good for a note or two!" Mr. Fortson exclaimed and I sighed. Frank was doing

the same thing as Dorothy. Why did everyone here think that we would be good together?

"Really? That sounds wonderful. Congratulations Mr. Victory," I replied and made the mistake of looking at him. His black eyes were trained solely on me and I couldn't help but look back because I was waiting for a reply. After a long, tense moment between the two of us, he reached up and touched my cheek.

"You are adorable Ms. Towers. I could eat you up any day of the week," he growled and I pushed his hand away.

"If you're going to be vulgar than please leave the table," I told him primly and turned to eat my piece of cake. Which I found to have been devoured by Ms. Hallows.

"Dorothy, did you have to eat my cake?" I glowered and I heard a chair being pushed back. Looking up I saw Mr. Victory go and pass the entire line with a single sentence that the cake was for me. Oddly enough, the line parted and he came back with cake in hand and even an extra fork.

"Your cake, Madam," he presented and set the plate down in front of me. "It seemed like a good time to say thank you for the compliment and sorry for making you upset."

"Oh, um, thanks," I murmured unable to say anything beyond that. I tentatively picked up the fork and took a bite. It tasted amazing. I don't know what he did to the cake but I hoped to God that he would do it again.

"What did you do to this cake?" I questioned trying not to groan. It was phenomenal.

"Nothing. Nothing at all," he smiled and I stared at him suspiciously. The cake here was white cake, not chocolate plus the briefcase this morning.

"I found something interesting on my desk this morning," I diverted the topic and my friends looked at me curiously.

"Really? What was it?" Frank asked excitedly and I had the image of a little kid bouncing up and down. Not something I thought a grown man should be doing. Not in the least.

"A card. A king of hearts actually. The really odd part was the fact that the head of king looked like you, Mr. Victory. Can you explain that? I don't mean to offend you but you don't exactly have common appearance," I asked and he looked at me with a twitch of his lips.

"I can't. In fact I had no idea about this card. Can you show it to me?" he questioned and I shook my head.

"I'm afraid not. You might try to steal it from me and I would prefer to keep it," I answered and he actually smiled at that one.

"I promise you that I won't steal it. Will you show me?" he petitioned again and I shook my head.

"I don't think so Mr. Victory. I just don't trust you," I responded and his eyes grew darker.

"Really now? They way you were playing with me this morning suggests that you trusted me a lot more than you think you do," he whispered and I felt his breath on my neck. Shocked, I jumped and whirled around. There was nobody there. Glaring at him, I stood up and said goodbye to the other two. I didn't know why he made me so mad but that didn't excuse

the fact that he was messing with me. Irritated, I ran up the steps and opened my classroom. Going in, I sighed and I turned to close the door when I saw him standing there looking tall and grim. He pushed his way into the room and closed it behind him. He then stepped forward and I took a step back. That's when I realized that at this angle nobody could see us.

"What do you want, Mr. Victory?" I demanded and he frowned.

"Why don't you trust me?" He interrogated and stepped forward again. I kept going back until I hit the wall but it didn't stop him. He only stopped when he was three inches away from me and his hands went flat against the wall.

"Why?" He muttered and I blinked. He looked like he was in pain and I frowned. Reaching up, I felt his forehead. It didn't feel hot so what was wrong with him.

"What's wrong?" I asked pulling my hand on the back of his neck. No. He was fine there too.

"Why won't you trust me Victoria?" he repeated and I started. Victoria was the name Jack called me in my dreams.

"Because I'm not Victoria. I'm Mina. Plus, you're not Jack," I gave in and looked pointedly at his chest. A hand pulled my face up and I gasped. The pupils of his eyes were gone and his hair had gone from a messy short to long locks that ran down his back.

"What gave you the idea that I wasn't Jack?" He growled and I tried to calm my self but it didn't work. I felt my heart was about to burst out of my chest when he drew back and walked over to my desk. Easily opening the locked drawer, he held up the card and it floated out of his hands and it hovered right in front of me. Shocked, I stared at it and saw that the man on the cover was gone. When I looked up at him again, I saw that his features had returned to normal.

"What are you?" I breathed and he was in front of me again.

"What am I? I'm a Royal. I come from the human race...well, a type of human race. You just so happen to be my dove, Victoria. You told me to look for you

and I found you. I told you I'd find you," he chuckled at the astounded expression on my face and cupped my face.

"You left me for fifty years! Fifty! I searched and searched and when I find you, you don't trust me. How cruel. You still have to make the same choice as before and I hope you remember what I said before. Then again, maybe I can help you make the choice? What can I do to make you love me?" he asked and my heart skipped a beat. His face was void of all expression so when he asked me that it felt like a million volts going through my system.

"You can stop making me want to back away from you," I answered and he smiled grimly. He took a step back and I realized that I hadn't been supporting myself this entire time. It had been him. Stunned at this realization, I glanced at him and he took another step back. I felt the air around me stop moving (when had it started?) and I took a deep breath to calm myself. It didn't work but I did feel better. Standing up, I examined him again. Everything that I noted

before was there and nothing was different, it was only my perspective.

"Prove to me that you're Jack," I said finally and he nodded.

"I broke your sink and when I said I was going to fix it, you told me to do it the normal way but it took me awhile and you kept asking questions. Another time, I got sick and you fell asleep by the tub and I woke you up by patting you on the head. Another time," he started and I put my hand up. Nobody knew about those dreams except me. I didn't even tell Dorothy because I thought that she might tell somebody else.

"So you're Jack. You have to understand. This is a different lifetime and I could already be in love with somebody else," I stated and he suddenly grinned.

"Yes, you are. With a man named Jack and here I am. So why are you fighting against it?" he asked and I shook my head. It was just too complicated...or was it? I don't have revenge anymore and I'm not exactly in a relationship right now. So what was the problem?

"Well...we can try this out. I'm not saying that it'll last but we can run with it for now," I said finally and my head was pulled up violently. His mouth lip locked mine in a crushing kiss.

"Don't worry. I won't disappoint," He murmured and I blinked. He was gone. Mildly shocked at the his reaction, I sat down in a desk and put my hand on my lips. Getting back up, I resolved to learn more about him and I went over to my desk. He had left the King of Hearts and it stared quietly at me. Nothing was on the front but on the back Victory was still scribbled on the heart but this time it had another name, mine.

"Is that the card you were talking about?" Dorothy asked from the doorway and I glanced up at her. She was looking serious which was unusual for her.

"Yeah. The man disappeared. How weird is that?" I affirmed and she took the card from me and looked at the back.

"You know...I think that Victory might be Jack," she suggested slowly and I nodded.

"He is. He just told me so himself," I told her and she admired my blush.

"It looks like he might be putting his..." she started again and I glowered at her.

"Sorry, I was just messing with you," she apologized seeing my irritated look.

"It's fine. It's not like you haven't done it before," I acknowledged and she grimaced.

"When you put it like that, it makes me feel bad," she pouted and I shrugged. I didn't feel in the mood for her antics at the moment.

"Listen, will you mind signing out for me? I'm getting a headache and I just don't feel like teaching right now," I asked and she nodded surprised. It wasn't often that I left work early. Thanking her, I picked up my bag and started walking to my apartment. I got there in a few minutes but it felt like hours. Unlocking my door and then locking it back, I stepped inside and put my bag by the door. Tossing my shoes, I flopped onto my bed and fell on a pillow. Moving so that I got comfortable, I pulled another

pillow towards me and hugged it. I felt like a giddy teenager again and that hadn't been the happiest time of my life. Then again it hadn't been to bad either. It just was. Relaxing into my position, I let my head fall on the pillow I was holding and I fell asleep.

"You can't leave me Jack! You can't!" Victoria exclaimed in my mind and I realized that it was me not Victoria.

"I won't. I never will. I promised remember?" a voice said from behind me and I whirled around, Felix Victory stood there looking almost terrifying with his pure white eyes and his long hair pulled back neatly. I ran towards him and hugged him.

"Don't worry. I won't. After all, I just found you," he whispered and I felt something against my hair. It took my a second to realize that I wasn't sleeping anymore. I tried to sit up in bed but I was held down by large arms that were wrapped around me. Shocked, I hit the offending body straight in the face.

"Ow! What did you do that for?" Felix exclaimed behind me as I jumped out of bed.

"Why are you in my bed!" I yelled turning on the light. Not a good idea. He was half naked with only pajama bottoms on and he just so happened to be sitting in such a way that I was able to get the full length of his body imprinted on my mind.

"What the hell are you doing in my bed?" I asked again but seeing him had taken the umph out of it so I decided to try to look mad instead. It didn't seem to work because a wolfish grin lit up his face.

"You called out to me in your sleep and I had to answer. After all you did take the card with you," he said carefully and I frowned. I didn't remember putting the card in my bag.

"No, I didn't," I snorted finally after thinking about it and he laughed.

"How can you know for sure? You don't seem to recall anything," he asked lounging back onto my headboards. Not something I wanted to have in my bed when I was trying to be angry.

"Go to hell," I muttered and looked at the clock. I had woken up right on time and this guy was not going to make me late.

"If I could, I would for you," he yelled as I went to make coffee and I shook my head. He was insane...but for all his bad traits I just couldn't seem to hate him. Plus with the dream I had, I knew that I wasn't going to get out of this anytime soon. Agitated with this conclusion, I made my coffee and went to get ready.

Chapter 4

King of Hearts Ch. 4

By the time I was ready, Felix had already changed and was drinking the coffee I had made.

"This is good stuff," he congratulated and I sighed.

"Why are you still here?" I asked and he smiled.

"Because you don't want me to leave," he replied and I shook my head.

"Yes, I do. You just won't," I corrected and he raised an eyebrow.

"I won't, huh?" he muttered and I turned around to talk back but he was gone. A sudden wave of

loneliness hit me like a ton of bricks but I didn't comment.

"Mr. Victory, tell me what Royals are," I said clearly and I heard a chuckle.

"See? You missed me?" he goaded and I sat down at the table with him.

"Answer the question," I snapped and his smile widened into a grin.

"Fine, Royals are humans that have the magical ability to go into and out of objects. Of course, we're called royals because we prefer playing cards but it's basically the same idea. Once you get used to bending the laws of physics you can't exactly go back. It all starts out with pain. First, you get really bad headaches and then you start to get angry. By the time that your power manifests itself, you're almost insane due to the pain. By that time, you have to either find another Royal or die. The Royal usually teaches you how to control it and how to get rid of the pain. Once you learn that, you get a ceremony with a Joker and they present you with a card. That card is your home for the rest of your life. If you

aren't able to keep it then you die. It holds you in place. Your entire existence counts on that card. Do you understand? You can't lose it," he said seriously and I stared into my coffee. It seemed like a horrible way to spend your life. Inside of a card and having to deal with all that pain but Felix seemed to had managed it well.

"How did you become a face card?" I asked finally.

"I was about five or six when I started having the headaches. It kept getting worse and worse. At one point my mother thought I had attracted demons and they were possessing me, so she took me to the priest and he tried to get the 'demons' out of me. It didn't work. In fact it made it worse, the anger attacks hit and I wasn't able to grasp anything beyond my rage. I ended up killing my mother...and my father. I had a couple of brothers and a little sister but they were away in our summer villa. It was lucky too because when they heard about it I was put into an asylum...you have to understand. They did whatever they could to make us 'sane'. It involved anything from starving us to torturing us for days on end. It

wasn't until the end that I thought that I would die. Honestly by that point I would have welcomed death. Even if I tried to describe to you the state I was in, it wouldn't be enough. I had been locked up for years and I would have turned twenty-one when I met King Montgomery.

"I had been locked up in my cell for weeks without food. By that time, my body had grown accustomed to malnourishment and I didn't really notice the hunger. It was obvious though that I was going to die there. Simple as that and I did die. However, Montgomery rushed into my cell and pumped my heart himself to make sure I kept living. I didn't know how he knew where I was. I still don't know but he saved me in a sense. Although, I didn't think so at the time. In fact, at first I thought he was some devil to take me to hell for killing my parents. He wasn't though. He had me freed and put me up in a small house on the edges of town. The next few months....were the worst months in my life. Montgomery had no idea what leadership was and he had more issues than any kind of King I ever knew. The man was still half insane from whatever

hole he had dug himself out of and we all knew it. I met a few other royals while I was there. Three Jacks, a Queen, and the other three Kings at the time. I don't know what became of them but I soon filled out my apprenticeship (if there was another way to address it I would) and I got my card. The Joker that had to be called was one of Montgomery's friends and he had told him all about our time together. I did have quite a bit of potential but I didn't get very far with it and the King had often called me a failure. When the Joker gave me my card with the name Victory on the back (that's your name in the Royal world) I flipped out. I was so...furious with him. He had taken me away from death and everything had almost been alright but he scared me with a name that nobody would accept with any kind of gratitude with a story like mine. That's the day when my true magic came out and blasted him away. Since I had already been awarded the card, I couldn't have it taken away but it was the Joker's choice to either kill me or chose another fitting punishment. He chose Shelia and that's a different story," he finished and I took a sip of my coffee. It was cold.

"Tell me about the Decision of the Dove," I ordered and tried to play the harsh command with a smile. It didn't work because he looked stressed and tired.

"The D.D. had been made years before I was born. If I had a choice I would change it. Then again, It's to keep the Royals in check. To be completely devoted to someone or something is a very disturbing feeling the first time you feel it but you get used to it over time. Yes, the Royals are completely devoted to their Dove. However, since the doves just have to love them in any way, we get the short end of the stick. Our Doves can cheat on us, hurt us, or even kill us and we aren't supposed to do a thing. It's true that I've had all three done to me by one special lady," he added and I felt my heart twinge.

"Shelia," I murmured and he nodded unhappily.

"She had been my world, when I knew her. I told her about my powers and about the decision. She didn't listen to any of it. Said it was just an old wives' tale. Not something that you want to make light of. She did anyway. She's cut men down before with her might, what gave me the idea that I would be any

different? In any case, she got bored of me and found a nice little count to mess around with. In any case, I'm getting off the topic. The Dove must choice either to or not to love the Royal. The love can be in any form, friendship, family, lover, and they must make the decision within the year of meeting the dove if not...well a massacre will be held by the Royal and he will be obliterated by the Royal members. A new card will be born in the world and we have to be on the look out for him. Recently a card did die so we've been looking for the new card with a diligence. However, my priority was to you first, not the card. In any case, we have to get to work...there we are," he suddenly brightened and I blinked. We were sitting in my classroom with him on the other side of my desk. My bag was even there when I checked. Meeting his eyes, I smiled and his eyes widened. His face broke out into a grin and I had the image of a purely happy Felix Victory just like his name should be.

"Are you going to tell me anymore?" I questioned and he shook his head.

"That's all for now. You know the basics of the D.D. and you know they shouldn't be taken lightly," he answered getting up and I realized that he had been sitting on air.

"I already know my decision. I'll love you. I can't promise a certain type of love but I can give it to you," I informed him and he stared at me. Then he laughed, long and loud.

"You haven't changed Victoria. Well, maybe in the revenge department but everywhere else you're just the same," he chuckled and left still shaking. Since I wasn't sure what to say to that I merely looked at my desk and found the King of Hearts staring back at me. I wanted to call him to see if it worked but I had a feeling that he would've gotten mad at me so, I put it in my pocket and got up. Grabbing my keys, I locked the door behind me on the way out.

Don't forget to vote! Thanks!

Chapter 5

King of Hearts Ch. 5

I met Dorothy in the library and filled her in on what had happened. When I told her about Felix, she nearly hit the roof.

"What? Are you serious? It's not April is it?" she spazzed and I sighed. I had a feeling it would turn out this way.

"Yes, I'm serious and you can't tell anybody!" I said and she sat back down into her chair trying to remain calm.

"So...he's the card, huh? That's a new pick up line I haven't heard before and from the sounds of it, it looks like he wants to put his..." she started and I

shook my head. I was seriously trying to get a hold of whatever I could at this point. The things he told me this morning were whirling around my head at top speed. Of course, I hadn't told her any of that. It seemed like that was more of another day kind of thing. Especially seeing the look on his face as he told me...no those things were not to be discussed. Suddenly tired, I sat at one of the table and she came out from behind her desk.

"Hey, don't worry, I sure he wants to put his, ah, toy in lots of girls," she said trying to console me and I gave her a look that made her pale. "Um...never mind. I'm sure he'll be completely faithful..."

"Stop it. I'm sure I'll be able to figure this out of my own. You don't exactly have to try to console me. It won't work anyway. I'm still beyond confused but it's fine. I'm sure he'll answer some of my questions later. So you don't have to be all supportive," I snipped and she frowned.

"You sound more stressed than you say you are. You're leaving something out," she accused and I shrugged.

"I can't tell you right now. It's that simple," I replied shrugging helplessly.

"Alright...but when you can, tell me. Cause I want to all the gory details! Including the part where he sticks his...." she began again and I put my hand over her mouth, blushing.

"Will you ever stop?" I hissed and she shook her head.

"Nope! That's the fun part!" she answered and I sighed standing back up.

"My..." I started.

"Students," she finished and I nodded weakly. She always did know when I was going to bail. "Go, I'm sure Nil is waiting for you again. He is your loyal student after all." Smiling my thanks, I made my way back up to my classroom, only to find that Nil was not waiting for me as Dorothy predicted.

"I wonder where he is," I mumbled to myself as I opened the door.

"Who is?" a soft voice asked from the back of the classroom and I started. Looking around, I found Nil, in his chair by the window.

"Oh! I was just looking for you!" I smiled and he only nodded and went back to his book. Confused by his sudden appearance, I glanced over at the door and blinked. It looked like it had been crushed from the inside. Frowning, I walked over to it and bent down to stare at it. It looked like it had finger marks in it...

"Nil, do you know what happened to the door?" I asked straightening up and he glanced at the door.

"No, how did that happen?" he scowled and I shook my head.

"I have no idea. I'll have to have Felix look at it later," I replied and then covered my mouth in shock. Why did I go immediately to him? Suddenly angry at myself, I stomped to my desk and plopped down angrily. Fuming, I opened the drawer to my desk to get started and I saw another card laying in it. This time it was a Jack and it was blank on the back. Completely baffled, I looked at the front again and saw that it was missing a picture. Deciding to think

about it later, I put it back in the drawer and looked at my computer. It wasn't off.

"That's just weird," I mumbled and turned on the monitor. A posed picture of Felix was on there looking very...unsuitable for school. Shocked, I immediately turned off the screen and looked around the room to see if anybody had noticed. Luckily, Nil had been engrossed in his book and no one else had entered. Thinking of all the curses I knew, I quickly turned on the screen and changed the wallpaper. Breathing a sigh of relief when it was over, I looked over at Nil and saw that he was still enraptured.

After that the day didn't go all that badly, even lunch was pretty good. Although, I did wonder why Mr. Victory didn't join us. Dorothy and Frank, Mr. Fortson, had told me very pointedly that I should go find out what was wrong...I didn't and they didn't like it one bit.

"If you want a relationship to grow then you must nurture it!" Frank boomed and I sighed. There was no way that this man could be soft spoken. More than

one of the teachers questioned his job title too. I mean seriously, how many artists do you know that will start singing Canada's national anthem while painting a portrait of a skeleton? I just found it awkward. Not that it didn't mean we weren't good friends. We were just on the wrong page this time and there wasn't anything that I could do about it.

"I'll nurture it, when I see that it needs to be nurtured," I answered quietly trying not to attract too much attention to our table. It didn't help that Mrs. Withers was glaring at us with eyes that could scorch Satan.

"Yeah, she'll nurture it all right. With his..."she started and I put my hand over her mouth for what seemed like the thousandth time.

"I don't know about you two but I'm full and I'm going back to my classroom," I excused myself and they both made faces at me.

"Yes, run to your prince, my dear! I'm sure that he'll be waiting for you on that beautiful chair he has in there! I'm sure that it can fit the both of you," He shouted and I ducked out of the lounge with an

irritated sigh. I did think about going to the music room to see if he needed me but it seemed like he didn't from that stupid wallpaper he put on my computer.

It was after lunch and it was also the second time that I had Nil, when it happened. He enjoyed coming to my class and the fact that I was the creative writing teacher only made it better. I really enjoyed the kid and if I could help him out then I did. Simple as that. It was during this class when Mr. Victory marched his way into my class while I was teaching and sat down in the back row...with a giant bag. This giant bag didn't look like any other bag I had ever seen in my life. It looked like it was made out of marble and only a giant man, like himself, could carry it. I went on to explain about haikus when he pulled something out of the bag, a giant folded piece of cardboard. He quickly unfolded it and held it up. It read: Come to the dark side, I have cookies. Which pretty much meant that he didn't want me to teach any more of this class period. Shaking my head slightly, I went on to read an example when he pulled out a blank piece of paper and started writing on it.

After I had read my second example and set my students to work, I looked over at the man and raised an eyebrow. He was being ridiculous by the way he was scribbling and writing something down. Finally, he stood up and went over to my desk to hand in the piece of paper.

"I have completed my work. Would you like to read it?" he asked in an over dramatic whisper and I glared at him. He smiled and wiggled the paper in front of my face. Scowling, I grabbed it out of my hand and studied it. The first ten or so lines had been crossed out to the point of having holes in the paper. Where as the next three lines seemed to have been rewritten to the point of exhaustion. So I looked at the last three lines and saw the completed work:

Flowers like sunshine,

I see your smiling face,

A beautiful rose.

I stared at the paper for a very long time before I looked up at the music teacher. His face looked worried and slightly aghast that I hadn't said

anything yet. A smile broke out on my face and I reached for a red pen.

"I'll have to give this an A," I told him quietly and his eyes widened. A grin spread across his face at my approval and I gave him back the poem.

"I have snacks if you'll let me share them," He said loud enough for the entire class to hear and I was suddenly faced with a roomful of hungry teenagers.

"Alright, but make sure they actually want something to eat first," I relented and he practically ran over to his bag and started passing out food and drinks. I didn't want to ask about how he suddenly got food or even where it came from. Although, where it came from might be an interesting topic. He came to me last, and reaching into his bag he pulled out another piece of that amazing chocolate cake.

"I thought you might want a piece after yesterday," he told me as he handed it to me and I smiled staring at it.

"I knew you did something to it," I mumbled as I took the fork he gave me and dug in. It seemed like it almost tasted better this time around.

"Enjoy it?" He whispered in my ear and I pushed his face out of mine.

"It's like heaven," I replied when he was a respectable distance away. I didn't need my students to start playing matchmaker with the two of us.

"Heaven, huh? I've been there and it's not so great," he muttered and leaned against the desk looking at me.

"Right. Well, you shouldn't be in my class anyway. I'm sure that you have a class next period that you need to get ready for. So, why are you in my class?" I added and he frowned.

"I can't spend some quality time with my favorite teacher? You even gave me an A," he pouted and I rolled my eyes. This guy was so awkward.

"I gave you an A because you wrote an A poem. If you hadn't, I would've given you another letter grade," I answered and Nil raised his hand. Waving

for him to come see me, he got up and walked towards my desk without hesitation.

"What's up, Nil?" I questioned calmly and he handed in his poem. A simple one about books and trees, just what I'd expect. He didn't want to show me, his teacher, what he could really do until he had perfected it.

"A perfect score but we both know you can do better. Bring me something amazing next time, ok?" I commented and he nodded, securely.

"If you really want to get to know her, give her the first edition of the Color Code series. She'd love it," Nil whispered suddenly to Mr. Victory and he grinned.

"Really now?" he replied and the teenager nodded.

"Considering that now, there are only twelve left in print. I really doubt that you'll be able to get one," he answered and went back to his desk with a serious look on his face.

"That kid is good. Man, he stuck up for you faster than anything I've seen before," He muttered as the bell rang and I dismissed the class with a smile.

"I wouldn't doubt it. Oh and I have something to show you. Do you know anything about this?" I asked pulling out the blank card and he stared at it.

"Dear Dove of Light, one of the Jokers has appointed you the keeper of the next Royal. We don't even know who it is yet," he murmured taking the card and I frowned. A keeper? What does that have to do with anything happening right now...and why does he look paler than a ghost?

*Sorry for being so late on this one! I'll try my hardest to get the nextone out sooner! Don't forget to vote! Thanks!

Chapter 6

King of Hearts Ch. 6

Back at my house after school, I was watching as Victory made dinner. Usually on these occasions, I fixed my own meal but he had insisted. He had clearly had a rough day after he had left with such a speed that I was unable to fathom it...much. I was still sitting at the table looking at him when he whirled around and grinned at me.

"Do you like mushrooms? I like putting them in pasta," he said happily and I nodded silently. He appeared to be in a much better mood than I had thought him to be when he had shown up at my door, or rather inside of my apartment making dinner.

In any case, when I came in my door and saw him cooking for me, I sighed. There was honestly no way to keep the man out of my house.

"Do you really think you should be cooking for me? I mean I'm not exactly sure you're supposed to be here at all," I questioned and his tattoos went down as his mouth did.

"Not supposed to be here? I'll have you know that I am wherever I want to be and that includes the inside of your home," He protested placing the pasta in front of me. It did smell delicious and it would be better than what I would have had before he had cooked.

"But what if I didn't want you here?" I retorted eating a bite of the noodles. Closing my eyes as I savored the taste, I could taste an odd combination of mushrooms, tomatoes, pasta, and other flavors that I couldn't place. Practically dragging myself back to the nonfood world, I saw that Victory was smiling at me.

"Why would you not want me here when I can cook such amazing foods?" He interrogated but not unkindly.

"Because it's a violation of privacy! There are some things in this apartment that I don't want you to see!" I exclaimed taking another bite and grinned. This pasta really was fantastic.

"...So can I come in here because I've already seen everything?" He asked and I stared at him from my place. I had just been about to put another forkful of pasta in my mouth but stopped when I heard that. Raising my eyes to his, I looked at him for a long moment. In which, my pasta slid evilly from my fork and back into the sanctuary of the bowl with a squish. Lowering my fork, I glared at him for one awful minute. As I did this, he took a sudden fascination with my tablecloth.

"You've seen everything?" I repeated levelly and he had the sudden appearance of a sheep.

"Well...mostly everything. I didn't exactly go through your dresser drawers and your bathroom closet...I didn't feel like looking at clothes and towels," he mumbled and I suppressed the sigh of relief. He hadn't found the shoebox then.

"I don't want you to look through my things," I scolded and he nodded fervently.

"Never again!" he proclaimed and made a great show of promising me the world as an apology. Not that I wanted the world. I just preferred to have my stuff left alone. Finally as he washed the dishes (yet another task he took upon himself...I felt much like I was being treated to something that might go on forever), I got the courage up to ask why the card was so important.

"The Jack of Hearts, why is it so important, Felix?" I approached the subject cautiously and he sat down with a sigh. I didn't know that scrubbing a pot could be that fast when I saw that the dishes were washing themselves. Not something I needed to see after asking an important question, taking in the knowledge that I would get distracted. I was just about to ask him to show me how it worked when the dishes stopped washing and fell neatly into a pile in the sink.

"I forgot how easily you got distracted," he murmured and I tore my eyes away from the inanimate objects and frowned.

"Got? I wasn't aware that I was dead yet," I replied and he rolled his eyes.

"You know what I mean. Don't be difficult," he answered not taking the bait and I harrumphed.

"Go on," I muttered waving my hand unhappily and he put his hand over his face.

"First of all, to be chosen as a Keeper is a responsibility that will ensure that I become the next Joker. Considering the fact that I'm guarding the Keeper that just adds to the responsibility and so, it seems that one of the Jokers wants me in his place. I have a feeling that it's the same Joker that put me in Shelia's hands. If it is...then he has a sick sense of humor. He's been messing with me for most of my life and I have a feeling that he chose you to get back at me for some odd thing that I did to offend him. I just hope that he stays away from actually meeting you. Then it would be a major problem and I would have to have a battle for position and it would lead to

the destruction of one of us," He started and leaned into his hand that still covered his face. I was about to ask him if he wanted to stop when he raised his hand.

"Don't stop me or I won't be able to start again," he instructed and I bit my lip to keep from answering.

Taking a deep breath, he lowered his hand and fixed his eyes on his arms.

"The Keeper of a Royal card is usually another royal. To even think of passing the position to one of your nature is unthinkable. The Keeper has to be able to maintain a good relationship with the Royal while at the same time be able to defend his or herself from attack from the very same card. I mentioned before that Montgomery found me and brought me back to life, well, he was the keeper of my card. Usually, the Royal doesn't manifest themselves before another Royal dies but in this case, you must have known about the Royal long before anyone else did before the Joker would give you the card. So you probably have a close relationship with one of your students and that's who the royal is. At least, that's what I'm

guessing. It could just as easily be a coworker or a family member. You do need to check out every venue and when we find the right one then we'll be able to corner him and I'll push him into the card. Of course, the first time it'll be against his will but we don't exactly have a choice. We have our way of entrapment and now we have to execute it. The only problem is tracking down everyone of your students and surveying them for a couple of days. That'll be a pain...unless you're able to narrow down the students?" He added hopefully and I agreed. It would be easier and although most of my students liked me, not a whole lot had a good relationship with me, as a teacher or a friend. In fact for this year, it only came down to four, Nicky, Monica, Jackie, and Nil. Odd how you once thought you were popular with students and it vanishes in a second.

"Just Nicky, Monica, Jackie, and Nil," I finally supplied and he smiled.

"That boy who defended you? There's something I'd like to see. If he ever became a royal, I might have to fight him for you," he joked and I scowled at him. It

really wasn't funny. Considering how Nil had been lately. Just how did he get in my room anyway?

"If you're a royal, would you show signs of it before you went mad with the pain?" I questioned and he nodded, his smile fading.

"Yeah, mostly it's just migraines but some of the more powerful Royals would show signs of their power escaping, or so I was told by Montgomery," he shrugged and I sighed. Maybe Nil really was a royal. That would solve more problems then it should.

Plus, I had an inkling that he would be a lot easier to tell then any of the three girls. Even Monica, might have a mental breakdown and she was the strongest of the three in good conscious and mentality.

As I thought the situation over, I saw him rise and start to make coffee. His back was turned to me but I could tell that the entire affair was bothering him.

"How're your students?" I questioned finally to get off of the topic and he glanced over at me grateful for the change in subject.

"Pretty good, considering that the idiot who taught before me couldn't sing a note to save his life. All the kids were off key and I had to get them warmed up and by the time I could actually get them singing, the bell rang for them to go! I hate this system of bells and more bells! I just wish that I could sit down and make the students learn!" He exploded, managing to get water all over the counter. Startled into action, I stood up to mop up the mess when I realized that the counter was already dry.

"You know, that could get annoying," I mumbled resuming my seat and frowned at the table. He looked over at my gloomy face and laughed.

"Why would you say that? I can fix everything!" He scoffed and I scowled at him.

"So? I can fix it by ordinary means and that's just as good!" I huffed and leaned back into my chair. Arms engulfed and I found myself being hugged to Felix.

"I'm only saying that I can fix whatever you need me too," He pacified and I pouted. It was still annoying how he could do whatever he wanted.

"Whatever," I said finally and pushed him away. "We still need to figure out who it is."

He sighed at my rejection and took his chair across from me. It was going to be a long night.

Please don't forget to vote! If you want to comment on my writing please go ahead. I need to have critism to get better. Thanks!

Chapter 7

King of Hearts Ch. 7

I woke up the next morning with Victory laying next to me, an arm thrown around my middle and the other was my pillow. Frowning, I shifted to face him. A shiver ran through me as I looked at him. He had changed at some point during the night. The tattoos on his face had moved down to his neck and had elongated to the point where they met at the base of his throat. Reaching out, I touched them delicately and traced the pattern. He mumbled something under his breath but other than that he didn't stir. He could do so much with his power but instead he was using it for such mundane things like washing dishes and giving my class snacks. Why was he with me?

Gently touching the one of the hearts I sighed inwardly. Deciding that it wouldn't be nice to wake him, I got up and started getting ready.

By the time he did wake up, I was walking to school.

"That wasn't very nice! I might've missed school," he clucked and I started. "Hey! Relax! I'm ready for the day." He pulled my bag from my grasp and smiled at me. Rolling my eyes, I walked faster.

"What? Not even a good morning?" He asked pouting and I kept going. Suddenly, he was right in front of me. "Listen. I know you're angry about...whatever you're angry about. I'm not going to start doing anything that shouldn't be done already. Will you at greet me?"

"I'm not angry," I answered and rubbed my nose. I really wasn't mad. "I just...I don't know. I'm not used to being around someone who could kill me with only a thought, I guess."

"Do you think I'm going to kill you?" He said aghast.

"No. Not really. It would probably take a lot to kill me. On your part anyway," I answered and he ran a hand through his hair.

"I wouldn't kill you! You don't understand that if you die, I'll go down a rank and..." He started.

"Rank? That's what you're worried about? Rank! No wonder I died in my last life. I couldn't stand living with you," I hissed and his jaw clenched. Shoving him aside, I wrestled my bag away from him and ran into the school. Signing in, I practically tore through the paper and then went straight to the library. Luckily, Dorothy was there and I locked the library door behind me. Getting behind her desk, I sat down on the floor and pulled my knees to my face.

"What's wrong, Mina? Are you...crying?" She asked startled and kneeled on the floor next to me. Pulling my hands away from my face, she examined me worriedly.

"Did you get hurt? Raped? Were you beaten up in an alley after being promised the world? Talk to me Mina! I can't help you if you won't talk to me!" She exclaimed and I looked at her through my tears.

"I can't. I can't talk about it...but I wasn't hurt. At least not on the outside," I sobbed and she bit her lip. Drawing me towards her, she hugged me silently. We stayed like that until the bell rang and then I got up. I was dry eyed by then but the look on my face must have been terrible because Dorothy gaped at me like a fish.

"To my students," I told her with a forced smile and picked up my bag. Rushing to my classroom, I steadied my mind and made sure that I was completely focused on my students. Felix may be able to kill me but I wasn't going to let that bother me while I was teaching.

"Good Morning!" I called to my class forcing the happiness but as the day went on I found that I didn't need to pretend. I was truly happy with my students so this was the way I was going to stay.

"Ms. Towers?" Nil asked coming up to my desk and I looked up at him from my papers. We had taken a break yesterday so that I could count how many people wanted to do what and I ended up doing poetry. Today however, it was back to Shakespeare

and the class wanted to do Julius Caesar. Which I didn't mind. After all, hearing some old guy dying from being stabbed is probably more than what some of these kids will ever hear. In any case, the class was now reading the first act of the play and I had already written up some questions for them to answer. I had already given them a brief overview of Shakespeare and some of his plays, so they were all set.

"What's up, Nil?" I questioned and he shook his head.

"It's nothing. I just finished my work and wanted to know if you needed for me to do anything else," he replied but from the way he was glancing around I knew that that wasn't the issue.

"Have you read the play already?" I asked and he gave a quick nod. "Well, then lets go out into the hall." Once we were outside the classroom, I closed the door and glanced down the hallway to see if anyone was there. No one was.

"What's wrong?" I repeated and he frowned.

"Ma'am it's not me I'm worried about. It's you. You're the one who's distracted and looking like the end of the world has come. Plus...you just feel weird," he added and I raised an eyebrow.

"I feel weird?" I inquired and he shrugged, uncomfortable.

"I don't know. You just seem weird. Are you okay?" He scowled at me and I smiled.

"I'm okay. There's just a lot going on and I'm just having a few issues. There's nothing to worry about," I clarified and he sighed, unconvinced.

"If you say so but since I have Mr. Victory next period I'll go ahead and ask him to check up on you," he told me and before I could stop myself, I grabbed his arm harshly.

"Don't tell him anything," I stopped and let his arm go. "Sorry. I didn't mean to grab you."

"If you're that mad at him then why do you keep looking at the door?" he asked and I blinked.

"What?" I interrogated and he shrugged again.

"You keep looking at the door as if you're waiting for someone. I just don't know why you keep denying it," he mumbled and I stared at him.

"You can go back to your seat," I instructed but not unkindly. After he left, I leaned against the wall out of the view of the window.

He was right. I had kept looking at the door. I had been waiting for Felix...no, Jack Victory. I had been waiting to see if he would apologize but instead he had stayed away. Then again, I was the one who gave the low blow this time. Maybe it was my turn to say sorry. A bang echoed thorough the hall as something slammed into the door of my room. Shocked, I ran back inside to find Nil having a migraine and he was ticked.

"Nil!" I yelled, narrowly avoiding a desk being thrown at me. His eyes met mine and for the first time, I saw the intent to hurt somebody, probably anything if it was able to get him away from the pain. Fear blossomed inside my chest and we stood there staring at each other for a long moment before a pencil jabbed itself in my arm. Then I was

surrounded on all sides by sharp objects, all waiting to pierce through me at a moments notice.

"Jack," I whispered, nearly incoherent. "JACK!" The word split through me like a single spear towards an army of thousands.

"What? Oh...well, this could be a problem," I heard him say irritably and I turned to him, trying to get the pencil out of my arm.

"Stop him but don't hurt him to badly. Just knock him out," I ordered seriously and he nodded.

"As you wish but first...I think that this need a little dulling," He agreed and the floating objects pushed themselves into a corner, then fell to the floor. Striding over to the boy he easily grasped his arm and hauled him up until he was just dangling from it like a rag doll.

"Not so tough when you've got someone past your level to beat, huh?" He murmured and dropped him. Pulling back his fist to punch him, he started to bring it down when Nil held up a hand. Jack went flying

back and hit the wall with a thud. Nil turned to me with a smirk and started walking towards me.

"You've done everything you can for me. The only question is what can I do for you? How about I kill him? You're having problems aren't you? Then how about I solve this one for you," He grinned and Jack went up into the air. Jack started choking and it seemed that he was having a seriously hard time breathing. Angry, I picked up a piece of splintered wood from a desk and whacked him straight upside the skull before he could stop me. A quiet thunk was sounded behind me and I looked to see Victory stand up.

"Ugh. Man, he's more powerful than even I thought. Then again, when Montgomery tried to get me inside a card it didn't work that well either. Although, I can honestly say that his dove never came to his rescue," he commented jokingly and I kneeled down next to Nil.

"How do we get him inside the card?" I asked and he smiled grimly.

"Not we, me. You don't have the kind of power to get him inside of the card. It's not even getting him in the card that's an issue. It's creating the world inside of it. No wonder Montgomery was always out of it," He explained and I frowned.

"You mean like another dimension?" I questioned and he nodded.

"Exactly. Plus, I have to get him inside of the card while I'm making the world or else the world won't stick. It'll just fall apart. You see, the world has to run on something and it takes our power as it's fuel. A real pain in the ass but it'll take the migraines away from our friend here," he answered and looked at me expectantly. Getting up and rummaging through my desk drawers, I finally found the card and I gave it to him.

"Are you sure this is going to work?" I said and he leaned over and kissed me lightly on the lips.

"No, but you love this kid like he was your own little brother so I'm going to try," he told me and took the card. Placing his hand on Nil's forehead, he took a deep breath and let it out slowly. When he opened

his eyes, I could tell he was somewhere else. You could tell by the way his eyes didn't focus on anything in the room and the way his tattoos kept moving around on his skin.

Giving them their space, I realized that I still had other students to be taken care of but when I turned around to look for them I found that no one was in the room. Startled by the sudden disappearance of all of my students, I looked out into the hallway. Nothing. In fact, it seemed like the whole school was empty. Guessing that it was just another thing that Jack did, I didn't worry about it until a hand laid itself on my shoulder. Gasping, I whirled around to find myself face to face with a man seven feet tall and more fit than a boxing champion. A single tattoo ran from his jaw line and up to his eye making a single line across his cheek that went back down and swirled into a square. A black and white square. It looked wrong on his tan cheek. A single strand of white hair dropped right above his green eyes and he pushed it back into place.

"Hello, Ms. Towers. I'm sorry to startle you but I did need to make myself clear to Victory in there. You see I'm the Joker that gave him his name and I would like to give my regards to the both of you. We have after all been looking for this boy for quite some time, however since the only thing that we were able to get out of our locators is that you knew him. So I left it up to you to find him. It seems that my efforts were rewarded considering that you have him in your custody. I've already made his mother forget about him so you can proceed with him as you wish," he finished and I stared at him for a moment before slapping him.

"You think that you can just waltz in here and take control of everything? I don't care if you're a god, you can't tell me what I can and can't do. Yes, I'll take care of Nil but it's because of my own right and for you to make his mother forget is just...it's just wrong! If anything he's going to need more support than what he already has! So you should go straight back to his mother and give her back her memories or I swear that I'll find a way to do it myself! What's so funny!" I roared at his laughter and he held up a hand.

" I never thought that I would be yelled at for trying to make the boy's life easier. You see once his mother finds out, she'll probably try to make herself rich off of the him. Then once she has a taste for it she'll just want more and more until she can't stop herself. You see power and wealth are their own type of addiction, so I don't see why you should even begin to try to recognize anything that I've been trying to do. After all, you're nothing but a mere mortal compared to us," he snickered and I smiled at him.

"And what...you think I care? You could point a gun to my head and tell me to say I'm sorry or you'll kill me and I still wouldn't bow down to you. Ever heard the saying that no man can move a mountain? Well, congratulations. You just met your mountain," I said sweetly and turned to go back inside.

"You are the opposite of Shelia aren't you?" He muttered to himself and I stopped. Seeing my immobile form he went on. "She was sweet like ice cream and sour in the middle. I knew it from the very start. It was amusing for me to see how he stumbled over himself to do everything she asked.

You know she still had no idea how much he loved her when she died. Not that it was much of a death. She killed herself after learning that one of her favorite lovers had done the same thing. You should have seen how he went on after that. Then again he did get demoted. That was interesting. Not something that I would have normally seen from him. Truthfully, I thought that maybe he would have killed himself and then you came along and ruined everything. You died and then he found you. A happy ending...or not. You two get to break the new Royal. Not even Shelia had that pleasure. She might've enjoyed it more though. In any case, I just came to say hello. Oh and just so you know, Shelia has been resurrected too. Isn't that peachy?" he grinned and disappeared.

Sorry for being late! Don't forget to vote and I'll give you a monkey! :P

Chapter 8

King of Hearts Ch. 8

"Jack?" I said walking back into the room. Victory was laying on the floor unconscious and the only sight of Nil was the card on the floor with his picture on it. Rushing to him, I knelt by his head and gently tapped his face.

"Jack, we have a problem. Jack!" I yelled losing patience. He groaned unhappily and opened his eyes to look at me. Grinning, he wrapped an arm around my neck and pulled me forward.

"Love is like a box of chocolates. You never know what your going to get," he murmured but I stopped our lips from meeting.

"A Joker was here," I interrupted and he shot up. Luckily, I had pulled my head back anyway so we didn't crash into each other.

"Which one?" He demanded and I blinked. He looked almost queasy.

"The one with white hair and a black and white tattoo. What's going on? From what you've told me Jokers just don't randomly come in here and tell people what to do," I interrogated and he frowned.

"This one does and he's a real pain in the bum. What did you say to him?" he asked and I found a sudden interest in the card next to him.

"Um...well...you see, I kind of slapped him," I answered and he visibly flinched.

"You WHAT? Do you know how much trouble this could put us in? Not only that but I might lose a rank and then..." he started but then I punched him straight in the face.

"Man that felt good," I sighed and held out my hand to help him up.

"What did you do that for?" he asked cracking his nose back into place.

"Let's just say that I don't like the ranking system as much as you do," I replied and he shook his head.

"If I lose a rank then I won't be able to protect you as well as with this rank. I was thinking of you the whole time I said the word rank," he guessed the cause to my anger and I stared at him for a long moment. Reaching up, I gently kissed him and then let go.

"Thank you," I told him warmly and a happy grin lit up his face.

"You're welcome. If I had thought that I would get you to kiss me like that then I would have gone on about rank sooner," he told me and his arms reached out for me. Dodging them, I bent down and got the card. Nil was inside of it and a single tattoo on his arm and the insignia in the corner showed what he was, the Jack of Spades.

"Are Spades stronger than Hearts?" I asked and he laughed.

"No. Why do you think that?" he questioned looking over my shoulder at the card.

"Because there's a game called Spades," I replied and he smiled.

"There's also a game called Hearts too," he pointed out and I felt him lean into me.

"Really? What happened to all the kids in here?" I questioned and he put more weight on me.

"Well...let's just say that you won't have any classes for a little while," he muttered and I turned around. He fell forward and just as he was about to hit the floor, I caught him. He had passed out...and I didn't have a car.

After getting him to my house, bringing the card with me, I set him down not so carefully in my bed. Not that you could blame me. It was hard enough not knowing if there were still people in the building and then trying to get him out of there? Well...that was something I never wanted to relive. Making sure he was comfortable, I went into my living room and settled down on the couch. I was going to have to tell

Nil about his mom at some point in the near future. I just didn't know how I was going to do that. Unless I was able to stop it. Jumping back off the couch, I raced down to my car (I walk to school for the exercise...) and slammed the door. Fumbling with the keys, I managed to turn it on and I backed out slowly. That happened to be the only slow part of the drive because I drove like a maniac to get to Mrs. Patton before the Joker did. Not that it was likely but I still had to try. I had brought Nil home before on a couple of occasions so I knew where his house was. Pulling in, I jumped out of the car and ran to the door. Ringing the doorbell, I waited and hoped for a response. I was shocked when Mrs. Patton answered the door and smiled warmly at me.

"Ms. Towers! It's good to see you. Is there something wrong with Nil? Please come in," she added and stepped back.

"There are a couple of things wrong with Nil. You see there are these people called Royals...." I began but she held up her hand.

"I know all about them. My husband was one of them. You know he died a couple of months ago right?" she interrupted and I blinked.

"Yes. Nil was gone for a couple of weeks due to that. What rank was your husband?" I questioned trying to get my mind around the fact that he had been a Royal.

"He was the King of Spades. I'm guessing the Jack took his place and since my son's been having migraines, then he must be the new Jack. Is that what you came here for?" she asked and I nodded.

"That and a Joker said the he was going to take your memory," I said and she sat down thoughtfully.

"So that's their plan of action huh? To make me forget everything that ever happened and I suppose I'll probably wake up at some odd place and then they'll say I have amnesia due to some traumatic event. He's got me right up his sleeve," She muttered to herself and I slowly sat down opposite of her.

"What do you mean? Wouldn't it be fine if you remembered everything? It's not like you're going to

tell everybody," I said confused and she shook her head.

"No. It wouldn't be fine. Mostly because I'm harboring more secrets about the ranking than anybody else in the Royal rankings. Besides the Jokers of course but I did some digging around about most of the people here and I found some pretty weird things. One of the Jokers has held his rank for longer than you would think possible. The other keeps changing with the wind. Something tells me that the old Joker is controlling everything and that could make things complicated. That's why they're going to make me forget. The only person I'm worried about now is my son," She added and I pulled the card out of my pocket.

"I'm not sure if he can hear you or not but he's in here," I said and handed it to her. Shocked, she stared at the card and then looked back up at me with tears in her eyes. A wobbly smile broke out on her face and I left the room. It may seem odd to other people but if this was going to be the last time you talked to

somebody then you really don't want other people in the listening area.

I had gotten settled in the dining room and I was falling asleep at the table when Nil's card fluttered onto the table face down. Rousing myself, I glanced around only to see the Joker standing there staring at me.

"Despite the fact that I told you that I was going to erase her memory you still brought him here. Why? Some last words to make yourself feel better? Is that it? Or did you simply just want to make the new Jack suffer? After all his mother won't even remember him now that I've taken away her memory. Sure I had said I had already taken it but it was worth it to see what you would do with it. Don't worry you didn't let me down," he chuckled and I glared at him.

"So this is your idea of fun? Making a mother forget her only child and letting the kid live on without his mom? You're one sick son of a..." I started and he slapped me across the face.

"I will not take that tone from you. You're nothing but a normal and all you can say is how terrible I am.

How time wasting. In any case, just be ready to take care of the little tyke or I'll have fun taking care of him myself," he grinned and disappeared. Picking up the card, I ran out of the house and started up my car.

"Nil, if you think you can control yourself, then you can come out," I told the card and it wiggled a bit before Nil was sitting next to me. He had been crying and I could tell that he didn't agree with what the Joker had said. Nil had needed those last few words. As we drove back to my apartment, he sat quietly crying the whole way and it was only when we reached our destination did he speak.

"Thank you. For what you did. I know that man wasn't able to understand it but you've given me a great gift," he whispered getting out of the car with his card. He stared at it as he picked it up and shoved it in his pocket. Shutting the car door behind him, we went inside.

I checked on Jack only to find him sitting up in bed looking dizzy.

"Jack? What's wrong?" I asked feeling his forehead. It wasn't hot but its wasn't warm either.

"Nothing. Nothing at all. I'm ready to fight for the cause when you are Shelia," he said trying to get up and I shoved him back in bed.

"You are fighting for anything until you're better. Now go back to sleep," I ordered and he smiled dryly at me.

"You must be really worried about me, Shelia. You wouldn't miss this fight for the world for you weren't then again...how's Henry? I was sure that you'd be with him right now and not me," he scoffed and I pulled the covers over him.

"I don't know a Henry and I'm not Shelia. I'm Mina Towers and I'm your Dove in this century," I told him and he shook his head.

"I don't believe you. My dove is Shelia and she may be off with Henry but I know she cares...kind of," he stated positively and I sighed. He was delirious and somehow I had become Shelia in his delirium. Not fun.

"If she cares then why does she go off with other men?" I asked sitting on the side of the bed and he frowned.

"Because she's scared to show her feelings. Her dad didn't like her showing affection. So she couldn't show it to me," he nodded to himself and I shook my head. Shelia had him brain washed and there wasn't a lot I could do about it right now.

"If you say so. You still have to sleep though. You haven't gotten out of that. Besides I'm sure even Shelia doesn't want to see you sick," I amended and he laughed.

"I doubt that more than anyone will ever know but it's a nice thought. You remind me of my maid that I had. Sweet Elizabeth. She was the most beautiful creature but because she was born in the wrong class we weren't even allowed to associate with one another. Not that it mattered much to me but to her...it was like the world had opened up and swallowed her whole. She loved me to the ends of the earth. Literally too because she ended up dying for me. You know, I loved her more than even Shelia and

she was my dove! Then again...," he drifted off into space and before long I could hear his breathing even out.

"Who's Shelia?" Nil asked me when I returned to the living room and I shrugged.

"One of his doves I guess," I murmured and accept the tea he offered me.

"Can we still go to school?" He questioned and I glanced up at him. He seemed so worried about it that I had to smile.

"I have no idea. You did make a mess of my classroom though," I joked and he frowned unhappily.

"I didn't mean to," he muttered and I put my hand on his across the couch.

"I know and it's okay. Although I do need a shower now that I'm reminded off the state I'm in," I said disgusted and he examined me.

"You look fine to me. Except for that hole in your sleeve but it doesn't look like there's any damage to

the skin," He pointed out and I looked at the offending lack of cloth. There really was a hole. The only trouble was that there wasn't any hole in my skin. I distinctly remembered a pencil going through my arm.

"But...there was...a wound," I gaped and he shook his head.

"Then you must have put a bandage and covered it up with make up or something because it isn't there now," he mumbled and I scowled at it.

"I was sure though," I said to myself putting my finger through the hole.

"Then maybe you're like us, like Mr. Victory and me," he suggested and I smiled.

"No. I haven't hand any kind of migraines or any kind of pain that might be that," I argued and he shrugged.

"Just suggesting. Um...could you tell me about what I am exactly? I mean it cost my mother her memory," he said softly and I nodded. I should have told him to begin with.

"Well, it's like this. You see, you and Jack are what they call Royals...," I told him all of it from beginning to end of what I knew about Royals and who they were and what they were for that matter but even after the explanation he didn't seem to grasp the whole concept. I didn't even know his limits so I wasn't really able to help him get it. By the end of it, we were both confused and I decided that it was time to call it a day. I got him settled in and made sure he was comfortable before I returned to Jack. Sitting on the side of the bed, I put a hand to his forehead and sighed. Now he was burning up and even if that did mean that his body was fighting whatever it was; it didn't mean that it was a good idea to bring him to a doctor. He wasn't human from what I could tell and even if he was I still wouldn't risk moving him.

"Jack you can really cause some trouble for me, you know that?" I said mildly aggravated and he rolled over to the sound of my voice.

"Victoria...," he muttered and then a strained look came on his once peaceful face. "I'm sorry." Gently

taking his hand, I kissed his palm and folded his fingers in.

"Then prove it by getting better," I answered quietly and got up to get a chair. Settling my self by the bed, I leaned forward and closed my eyes. A shower could wait until the morning.

Don't forget to vote!!!! Thanks!

Chapter 9

King of Hearts Ch. 9

I woke up to Jack's delirium.

"Elizabeth? Could you get me something to drink?" He said tapping my head and I sat up, rubbing my eyes.

"I'm not Elizabeth," I mumbled but I got up anyway. After checking on Nil (who was still sleeping, lucky), I fixed a glass of water and brought it to him.

"You remembered the ice!" He exclaimed happily and I blinked. He hadn't asked for ice.

"Um...I guess," I replied surrendering and he grinned at me taking the water. Draining the glass, he threw it in the air and twirled it around with his powers.

"Elizabeth, remember that day when we were able to snick off into the woods for a picnic? That was a good day. Although Shelia was being a complete...well...she wasn't being very nice," he told me mildly and I climbed on the bed to get the glass from the air. It dropped a little ways into my hand and I looked over at him. He was fast asleep and I put the glass on the table.

After taking the best shower of my life, I looked in on Nil and found that he was awake.

"Hey," I greeted him and he raised a hand half heartedly. He looked terrible. His hair was messed up and he looked like he had been crying earlier. Sitting next to him, I put an arm around him.

"Your mom or just the whole thing?" I suggested and he shook of my arm. I put it securely in my lap and he avoided my gaze. His face was screwing up in an effort not to cry and I felt my own eyes start to tear up. He was too young for this. Not only that but he

looked like he needed Jack and not me to help him out with this. Jack understood this better than me. The whole hopelessness of the situation and I started crying. I didn't cry with great gasping sobs but quietly as Nil did. Pulling him towards me, I hugged him and tried not to kill the Joker. He pushed me away gently after awhile and I saw that he had started crying again too.

"We're hopeless, aren't we?" I said wiping my eyes with my hands and he smiled weakly at me.

"Not so hopeless. You seem to do a great job of handling Jack and me. I'm the one who's hopeless. I can't even save my mom," He scowled at the carpet and I mussed his hair.

"A great job? I can't even get Jack to not get mad at me. I'm not exactly the most amazing person here. If anything, I think that Jack and you are. I don't think I'd be able to go through what you two did before I just ahead and killed myself. I don't have the sort of strength that you two do for this," I answered and he stared at me wide eyed.

"But...all we're doing is living," he blinked rapidly trying to get my conclusion past his thought process. It didn't work too well because he was still staring at me when I shook my head a few moments later.

"Sometimes living is the hardest part of life," I told him and he shook his head.

"No, killing yourself is the hardest part. It just goes against every instinct so people have to be both brave and depressed enough to take their own life," he disagreed and I frowned.

"That's the coward's way out of it," I stated and he glared at me and I glared right back. Finally seeing the humor in the disagreement, I burst out laughing with him joining in after realizing what I had. The sounds of our laughter disturbed Jack, who stumbled into the room during our amusement.

"Elizabeth! What's going on in here?" He roared and we both abruptly stopped. A mixture of hurt, unhappiness, and straight up suspicion was playing across his face before I stood up and walked over to him and let him lean against me.

"This is Nil, remember? He's a new Royal and he needs your help. Will you help him?" I told him and he glanced at him after staring at me for a long second and then sighed. Bring me back to my room. I can't believe that Shelia changed the castle again. She really ought to learn that changing it won't change much. I'll see what I can do Elizabeth but I'm going to have to bring it past Shelia first. She is my dove after all," he said consolably and I bit my lip. Maybe drugs would help him. He was still burning up and he looked so out of it.

"You know...Shelia said for you to take a couple of pills every four hours or so. I didn't want to give them to you but I know how you're affected by meds," I said slowly trying not to give away my lie and he whirled on me with a force.

"How dare you! You know that I must obey my every wish from my dove! Give me the pills!" He threw me against the wall with a dull thud and I gasped. Pain made it's way up my spine and I slowly stood up to get the Tylenol. The sharp pains didn't go away and I knew that I was probably going to have a bruise later

on. Padding my way to the bathroom, I opened up the pill bottle and I was about to hand him only two pills when he grabbed the bottle out of my hand and gulped it down. Horror settled deep into my stomach as he glared at me before making his way to the bed and falling asleep. Why did he always do stupid stuff when he was sick? I wondered to myself before feeling his forehead and found that he wasn't burning up anymore. Instead it appeared that he was getting cold, very fast. Tucking in the blankets around him, I remembered that I had a heated blanket and started searching for it. I literally tore up my room before I found it hiding under my bed. Fumbling with the plug, I managed to turn it on and remove the top blankets before putting the heated blanket on top. Putting the other blankets back into place I examined my handy work before I started cleaning up again. Nil ended up joining me after he saw that Jack was asleep. Cleaning up in record time, we made our way to the kitchen where I started making coffee and trying to remember what I was having for breakfast that day. Nothing seemed to be the right thing so I ended up not eating and just

drinking coffee while Nil messed around in the fridge. I didn't want to know what he was making until a yelp met my ears from inside. By that time, I had moved to the living room, so I got up and went to investigate. It was a mess. Some kind of white substance was on the ceiling and he was lying on the floor looking like the whole world had just collapsed from under him.

"Nil! What happened?" I exclaimed staring at the suspicious white goo. I could swear that the entire thing was something that I didn't want to think about but the way that Nil was sobbing, I couldn't help but pay attention.

"I don't know! I tried to make my mom's pancakes because I saw that you weren't eating and I just wanted to help and then the next thing I know the batter's on the ceiling and the kitchen's a mess. I don't even know what happened!" he sobbed and I rubbed my nose thoughtfully. It seemed that maybe Nil's powers had gotten out of control when he thought of his mother so he ended up loosing control of his powers...or so I concluded because I really

didn't want to look at the goo again. Kneeling next to him, I grabbed his arms away from his face and he looked at me unguardedly. A wave of pity hit me and I smiled warmly at him.

"Hey, calm down. It's alright. I know that all you wanted to do was help so why don't you go ahead and clean this up? I'll make something to eat and then we can have breakfast together. How does that sound?" I asked and he nodded and waved his hand numbly. When I looked around the kitchen the next moment, I found that it was clean and it even sparkled in some areas. Shock numbed my system when I realized that he already had this much control over his powers.

"How did you..." I started and he frowned.

"I practiced while you and Jack slept. I wanted to be able to help you out because both of you were kind enough to help me. At first it was really hard and at one point I even blew out half the apartment but I was able to control it after awhile and...well you had your hands full and I didn't know when to tell you," he shrugged and I gapped at him for a second. I

wasn't quite sure how to react but when he got up and went to the table. I snapped out of it and made some pancakes for us.

Putting the plate in front of him, he started eating with actual manners and I put a bite of it in my mouth. I had forgotten how good food could taste when you had the ability to make it yourself. Stuffing the rest of it down, I finished with a contented sigh and I glanced over at Nil. He was staring at me wide eyed and I grinned sheepishly.

"I forgot how good my cooking is," I explained and he chuckled with an unexpected smile as he started eating again. "I'm just surprised that you were able to gain control of your powers so quickly."

"It's not that hard. All you have to do is bring that feeling that you have when you love something and it's there to control. Well...at least for me. It's a good way of coping with what happened to my mom...I'm able to remember her and that's what helps me control it. Most...of the time anyway," He replied and I put my chin in my hand. He was able to live so

easily, even with all that had happened to him. It really made me wonder how he did it.

"I do it by being able to remember what I had and the fact that my mom's not dead. She just simply can't remember me. I mean it still hurts but it's not like I can't hold on to her. If I really wanted to, I could still befriend her and she could just as easily become the person I knew. Not only that but I'm certain that I'll be able to give her back her memories someday. It's a goal that I need to be able to go on. I will give her memories back," he answered my unspoken question and I nodded thinking hard. A goal...sounds simple enough and to be able to rationalize it like that. It's almost as if he doesn't want to accept that his mother might be gone. Which is perfectly fine for the time being. I don't exactly have any objections and he doesn't seem to mind. It gives him something to look forward to. Shaking my head, I got up and started washing the dishes before it was yanked out of my hand by some invisible force and began washing itself. Turning around, I saw that Nil was controlling the dishes with a concentrated look on his face. Suppressing a sigh, I thanked him and went to check

up on Jack. He was sleeping peacefully or so I thought until he grabbed my wrist and pulled me into the bed next to him. Flopping a protective arm around me, he stared at me for a long minute before putting his hand up the back of my shirt.

"Hey!" I protested but stopped when I saw a mournful look on his face.

"What did I do to you Mina? What's with this bruise?" He asked me and a slight tingling sensation rippled up my spine. Looking determinedly at the space above his head, I replied, "Nothing at all. You were sick and you didn't know what you were doing."

"Bull! You could have stopped me at any time!" He glowered and I shook my head.

"You thought I was someone named Elizabeth. There was no way to stop you. You still thought your dove was Shelia," I explained and he pulled me closer.

"She torments me even in this life," he said bitterly and I pushed his hair out of his face.

"Then forget her," I suggested and he stared at me in shock. Grinning, he leaned forward and kissed me. A

gentle one filled with soundless mirth at my reply. I didn't understand why he was laughing but since I had diverted the subject away from him hurting me, I didn't really care.

"Do we really have to keep going slow?" He whispered in my ear and a shiver ran down my spine that had nothing to do with being cold. Pushing away, I smiled at him and nodded.

"Yes. Nil's here and I don't want him to randomly walk in on us. Plus, you need to teach him. He's already gotten enough control over his powers to be able to clean the dishes. Which you have to admit is pretty amazing," I commented and he shot out of bed. Rushing to the bathroom, I heard the shower running in mild amusement. So he was taking a shower...even though he could clean himself by just thinking about it. Guess he needed a second to think. I guessed and got out of the giant bed a lot more slowly than he had. Straightening up, I glanced in the mirror and decided that I was respectable before Jack came running out of the bathroom, fully dry and he leaned over to kiss me on lips softly before

walking briskly into the living room. Following behind, I found Nil and Jack examine each other warily.

"So you have a handhold on your power, huh?" He said finally and Nil nodded slowly.

"More or less," he answered and Jack nodded thoughtfully.

"Good. Cause until you have a better hold on it, we're going to battle it out. So you better get ready," he stated and grabbed Nil's shirt in a fist and they both disappeared. Shocked, I stared at the empty space for a second before picking up a pillow and threw it uselessly at the space where they had been.

"Idiots!" I yelled unhappily and huffed. Sitting down, I glowered at the spot. Waiting for them to come back home.

Don't forget to vote!!! Thanks!!!

Chapter 10

King of Hearts Ch. 10

I was reading Julius Caesar for my English classes that I had to teach and it wasn't helping my patience. Throwing it down onto the table in exasperation, I got up and made my way to the kitchen. Nil had pretty much cleaned all of my rooms to the point where they started to sparkle in a really scary way; so I didn't have much to do in the cleaning department. Leaning against the counter, I faced the dining room table and sighed. I wished they would come home already. I was worried that they would train so hard that they wouldn't come back...

"Well you aren't very pretty," a snide voice said from in front of me and I blinked. An Amazonian woman

stood in front of me with her hands on her hips and a frown on her face. The first thought that crossed my mind was: This woman is huge. The second was: How did she get in my house? And the third....well...it's not exactly appropriate.

"Uh...who are you and how did you get in my house?" I asked after a long moment and she stared at me.

"I teleported here. Didn't Vic teach you anything? Jeez. He's so lazy," she said with a small laugh and sat down at the table grinning at me. This woman knew Jack...so she must be....

"Shelia!" I exclaimed scowling and she nodded.

"Took you long enough! Man, he really has been lazy with the way you've been acting. All ignorant and not much to look at either. Why did he choose you?" She thought aloud and I slammed my hands on the table. She had no right to barge into my home and start ranting about Jack. Plus she had just insulted me and I was getting mildly ticked off at her rudeness.

"Don't be mean to the dove, Shelia. I'm sure that Victory has his reasons for choosing a woman of such

demeaning qualities," A smooth voice said from behind me and I whirled around to come face to face with the very man that I had slapped not too long ago. The Black and White Joker.

"You!" I accused and strode over to him intent on slapping him when a large arm blocked my way.

"Come on, Mina! I don't need anyone getting hurt here! We're just here for a friendly hello...except that Queen over there! But she always gets in the way of other people," a familiar loud voice greeted my ears and I turned slowly to face a man I've known for just a little while.

"Frank, what are you doing here?" I whispered and he smiled sheepishly.

"Well, I hate to say it but I'm the one who found you first and since Victory and I are such good buddies....well...I just stuck around for awhile to make sure that you were what he was looking for. And it seems you were because you definitely didn't back down from Giovanni here. And uh...I'm sorry for misleading you but me and my dove just wanted

to be friends," He grinned and pulled his arm away and wrapped it around another friend's waist.

Dorothy, Dorothy Hallows. The same woman that I had shared everything with and she was a dove of one of them? Why didn't she tell me? She knew but she didn't say anything at all. To make sure that I was what Victory needed? What kind of reason is that?

"If she faints then I'm taking back Victory," Shelia droned and I snapped back to the present. This was no time to be worried about why my best friend had betrayed me. I had three very powerful people in my apartment and now I had to get rid of them somehow but first...

"Frank, what card are you?" I asked and he blinked.

"I'm the Colored Joker," he answered and I nodded. It made sense. He was always wearing paint splattered clothes and painting with all the colors he could use. Although, I never did see his tattoo like on the Black and White Joker.

"Hey. I'm sorry for misleading you but we had to know that you were the right one," Dorothy

explained taking my hands in hers and I examined her face for a second, trying to find some trace that none of it was real. I couldn't find anything.

"I see. There's nothing you can do now. The cat's out of the bag," I answered and a low chuckle met my ears.

"What an appropriate phrase. After all, Dorothy here used to be a cat for a little while, weren't you?" The other man said and I turned to the detested excuse of a person. His eyes were cold as they regarded me and I fought back a shiver.

"I don't care what she was at this point. All I want to know is why exactly you four are here," I responded and he grinned frostily.

"Nil and Jack, of course," Shelia smiled and my teeth ground together. Something wasn't right. Then again something would have to not be right in order for them to come.

"What about them?" I questioned folding my arms and Dorothy looked nervously at me.

"They both have the power to become Aces," She whispered and I stared at her.

"Aces?" I asked confused and the queen scoffed in the corner.

"Aces are the only things that can ruin the order of things. They have enough power to do whatever they want, whenever they want. Most of the time we're able to put devices on them that would limit their power such as the one that's in Jack's heart. Montgomery had put it there so that Victory wouldn't blow up the place with the amount of energy he was expelling. Now that he's got you though...he should be able to control it. In fact you're basically the reason why both of you are even living today. It mainly has to do with the fact that you forced Victory to resurrect you without knowing that he did it. When that happened, his limiter took a turn for the worse and this time it's even worse because even though, those two are in their own reality it could still affect us here. Which would be very bad. If even the smallest thing changes then it'll all be out of

sync," Dorothy explained and I scratched a small bug bite on my arm.

"And how is this different from what you guys do?" I replied and she winced.

"It's different because we don't actually change any of the events in time. We could but we don't. Plus, we police people who want to change it and then destroy them with a vengeance. We don't want to have to do that with Jack though so please tell him to not use his powers that way," She begged and I nodded. That was easy enough.

"We could just show him that we mean business by kidnapping his dove," Shelia commented and I stared at her.

"And unleash him onto a world of innocents?" Frank roared and the other Joker shook his head.

"Not all of them are so innocent and you know it," he told him and Fortson turned to him furious.

"That's still no reason why the rest of them should die," he yelled and took a step towards him.

"I thought that it would be rather amusing to watch," he retorted calmly and Frank flushed.

"What about Nil? He would end up going after her too with a craze that we both know will not end well," Dorothy said and they both turned to her. At the mention of Nil both of them had grown quiet and I wondered almost thoughtlessly about what would happen if I walked out of the room right then.

"We could leave a note for Vic and then make Nil go find her as a result. Then we all get what we want," Shelia suggested and they all turned to her. She was making a design on the table with her finger and I rushed over to stop her.

"Hey! I paid good money for that table!" I yelled and she looked at me startled.

"I thought you said that the vapors would have a calming effect," She accused the joker behind me and I turned to him confused.

"They were supposed too but it seems that she's more worried about her furniture than anything else. How odd. You would think that she would get upset over

Victory and Nil instead. She really is strange," The Joker said and I glared at him. I still didn't like him.

"Vapors?" I asked finally trying to get the fogginess out of my head. It wasn't working but I had to try.

"They're supposed to make you relax and go to sleep. I'm surprised that you even lasted this long," Shelia informed me and I leaned heavily against the ruined table. Why were they drugging me again?

"Why?" I managed after a second.

"We needed you in a way that wouldn't alarm Victory and Nil. If either of them had seen this place turned upside down then it would have easily been pointed to thieves and he would have gone looking for you all over town. However, if we take you like this then he'll know exactly who took you," the man answered.

"If you're so worried about his power getting unleashed then why don't you kill him?" I muttered.

"If we kill him then it would bring distress to you and that would just bring him back again. Which would defeat the purpose," he explained and I nodded slowly.

"So you're kidnapping me to say that you don't want him to destroy the world while you're not looking?" I concluded and he smiled at me.

"You seem to be able to think more clearly when you're drugged up," he smirked and I glared at him.

"It sounds to me more like you're scared of dying than anything," I shot back and his face froze. Within milliseconds, he was in front of me and he was pushing me against the wall.

"HEY!" Frank and Dorothy shouted at the same time but he didn't pay them any attention.

"When I want to die then I'll die. You nor anybody else will make that choice for me," he spat in my face and I grinned at him.

"What ever made you think that I wanted to kill you? Although...I would prefer you dead," I told him and he went berserk. Smashing his fist through the wall, he threw me towards the kitchen counter. I was only just barely caught by Fortson before he was in front of me again glaring at me.

"Little girl, you've just gotten yourself in a whole other world of trouble," He hissed at me and I smiled at him.

"When I was little, I was told that it was always bad to disagree with your elders," I quipped and he slapped me hard, breaking my nose. The pain still wasn't enough to clear my head but I could tell that if I pushed him any farther than I really would be dead.

"Don't," Dorothy warned him and he grinned at her in a madman kind of way.

"I wasn't planning on it but if she goes any farther..." he drifted off and I got the main idea. Plus the drugs were starting to take over even more. I didn't mind too much that I was practically laying on top of Frank. I was just tired and when Dorothy nodded and smiled at me. I decided that it would probably be a good thing to follow her advice and just drift off into sleep. Luckily, it didn't take me too long to go into the sweet, dark abyss of dreams.

Sorry for the wait! Here's the next chap. New and improved. Vote!!! Please!

Chapter 11

King of Hearts Ch. 11

It wasn't a good thing to wake up in a place you don't know. I didn't even have Jack or Nil with me. Sitting up, I looked around the room in a sleepy way and found myself face to face with a giant panther. It's black eyes glittered calmly at me and I wanted vaguely to pet it. Reaching out, I put my hand on its head and smiled. It's fur was soft and silky to touch and I leaned over to hug it.

"I love cats," I sighed wrapping my arms around it and it leaned into me.

"My name's Montgomery," It whispered softly in my ear and I nodded not thinking too much about it. The

named kept tickling my brain though until I finally gave in to the nagging in the back of my mind. Beyond the remaining vapors of the drug I found the answer to my question. It hit me like a bucket of ice and I threw myself away from the giant cat landing squarely on the bed that I had slept in. Sitting up quickly, I stared at the cat and frowned.

"You're supposed to be dead!" I exclaimed and pointed at him like an idiot.

"Who told you that?" he growled waving his tail. "You know pointing is rude." Realizing that I really was still pointing, I quickly put my arm down and glared at him instead.

"You ruined Jack's life!" I accused angrily and the panther started wheezing. It was only after Montgomery started coughing that I found out that he was laughing.

"Ruined...I saved that kid's life! Then those idiotic Jokers started getting in the way and now I'm like this and Victory's got that...well...queen for a dove," he sighed ending his retort and I shook my head.

"Not anymore. I' m his dove," I corrected and those huge black eyes stared at me for a long moment.

"You're serious," He said quietly and I nodded.

"I don't know what happened between them besides Shelia never making the decision," I shrugged and he nodded thoughtfully.

"She didn't like making those kinds of choices. It was a giant crush to her ego when Victory showed up I guess. She didn't want the extra baggage, I suppose. She probably didn't make the choice because of that," he informed me and I crossed my arms angrily. She was always messing with him.

"Why should I trust you?" I spat at him, looking for a target.

"Because I'm all you've got. Plus, if I wanted to kill you I would've done it already," the cat shrugged and I rubbed my nose. He was right.

"So how do we get out of here?" I asked quietly and he laid down unhappily.

"We can't. I've tried to get out of here hundreds of times. I'm just not able to leave," he puffed sadly and I jumped off the bed. The wood floor was cold beneath my feet and I could see why I wouldn't want to look beyond the bed curtain. The entire room was extremely disturbing. Spider webs hung off the wall in groups and torches were on every wall. The light wasn't even coming from them but from this eerie glow that was in the center of the ceiling. The walls themselves were black with bright red splotches that looked awkwardly like blood...that and the random torture device in the corner and I wanted to get out of there.

"What exactly is this room?" I questioned hiding behind the bed curtain to look at the panther again and he blinked up at me.

"It's one of the spades' rooms. I think it might be the King of Spades but I'm not sure. He usually enjoys this type of thing..." His words drifted off with a kind of echoing that I didn't like in the least.

"And uh...does he know I'm in here?" I asked and he shook his head.

"No. The worst thing that could happen is that he might think that you're a present from Zekan and you'll end up dying from torture wounds," he answered lazily and I gapped at him.

"Who's Zekan?" I finally said after staring at him moronically.

"The black and white Joker," he replied and I nodded slowly closing my mouth. So...if I didn't get out of here...Jack would come and find me dead and probably go berserk...not something I needed to die over.

"I say we look for a way out," I decided and ran out from behind the curtains again. I ran my hand along the wall, searching for any kind of opening or loose section or anything! I just couldn't stay in there for the King of Spades to mistake me for a present. I came to the last section of the wall where the giant torture device was and I ran my hand along it only to find the smallest doorknob in the world sticking out of the plaster. Excited, I turned back to my prison mate and grinned.

"I found a door," I informed him and he shook his head.

"There's no way you found a door. I've looked for ages and haven't found one," he growled but got off the bed anyway and padded his way to me. "Where is the..." he stared at the door handle for a long moment before snorting.

"I suppose there are some reasons why Jack likes you so much," he muttered and I smiled. Not quite the reaction I wanted but I could tell that he was pleased with me.

"Well, the only question is that do you trust me?" I asked and he blinked at me.

"No but we're in the same boat," he responded and I nodded. Good enough for me. Pulling open the door, I shoved him through first and followed after him.

The other side of the door was huge. A giant marble corridor extended on either side of us like a massive ocean. Columns were the only thing that separated us from being seen and the portraits of past Royals weren't encouraging. Plus, they're eyes almost

seemed to be following us so I felt like I was being watched. Which wasn't good considering that we were trying to escape.

"Love the décor," I grumbled and Montgomery sniggered.

"You should have seen it when I first came here. Now that was something to be feared. The Color Joker then was a total pain in the ass though. I ended up trashing the place before he even had the chance to stop me. Ah...those were the days," he remembered nostalgically and I rolled my eyes. We didn't have the time for this.

"Which way?" I questioned looking around and he nudged me with his nose.

"The right. That's the way out. But...it has been awhile..." he trailed off and I bit back a retort. We were doomed. That was the only explanation.

A couple of hours later, I passed a painting of an old man with a cigar in his mouth and a diamond in his hand. I had past the portrait thirty minutes ago...for the fifth time.

"This is the wrong way," I informed my companion.

"Shut up," he hissed at me and I frowned. Montgomery had become more irritable as time passed. Not that I could blame him, the panther must have been locked up in there for years if he didn't even know that Shelia wasn't Jack's dove anymore.

"I thought you knew this like the back of your hand," I teased trying to make him calm down.

"I have a paw," he roared, guess that didn't work.

"It's just a figure of speech," I mumbled and he grunted. I had a feeling that if I said anymore than he would rip my throat out.

"It's a piece of..." he started before a soft laugh interrupted him. Whirling around, my eyes met a familiar face.

"Frank!" I exclaimed happily, completely forgetting that he had betrayed me. He hadn't it seemed and he had a wistful look on his face.

"I can't have you escaping. If that happened then Jack wouldn't come," he said quietly and I stared at him. This was not happening.

"But...you're on my side! I trusted you!" I protested this new conclusion and he shrugged off the comment.

"So? My only side is the Royal side," he mumbled and I blinked. I really wanted to cry at this point until the softness and gentleness of his voice penetrated my brain. Why was he speaking so quietly? Frank Fortson was the loudest person I knew...was this just another way of showing that I didn't know him or was it something else? There was only a couple of ways to find out...might as well try out the easiest.

"But...but you wanted to be like Leonardo Di Vinci!" I sobbed faking every moment of it. I may not be good at faking anger but I could do tears like a tiger eating a rabbit. If he got what I meant (which he should, he loved Leonardo like a master) then he should be thinking of the flying machines that Di Vinci had been obsessed with. In literature terms that could easily mean flight which can be interpreted as

escape. So the basic question was, will he help us escape?

My pretend sobbing was getting hard to pull off with showing my face so I kneeled next to my navigator and put my face in his fur. My tears at this point had basically dried up and I was just making noise as I waited for his answer. Thank you drama course in college!

"Di Vinci was a Royal," he finally commented and I tugged my face closer to Montgomery's ear. Letting out a particularly loud hiccup, I whispered under my breath, "He'll help us." Thanking god for Fortson's quick thought processing, I pushed away from Montgomery and stood up.

"Oh really? Is that what helps you sleep at night?" I spat pretending to be mad. Maybe I should be an actor. This was fun.

"Sleeping isn't a priority," he answered with a twitch of the mouth. If he held out longer than me, than I could applaud him.

"But betraying your friend is?" I yelled and realized that I should have been keeping it down. The others might come and that would ruin the plan...or maybe it would help it. If we ran it the right way.

"I work and live for the Cards. Friends aren't important," he muttered and his hands clenched. Either, he was trying not to laugh or trying not to hit me. I was hoping it was the former.

"I hate you!" I screamed at him like a little kid and turned to run away. Giant arms grabbed me and held me still as I tried to get away.

"I don't appreciate being hated while trying to help and your acting skills suck," he informed me and I grimaced. There goes my dream of an acting career.

"So you've got her," A soft voice said and he twisted us around to face Zekan, the Black and White Joker.

"Yes. What do we do with her? Stick her in another room?" He questioned and Zekan looked thoughtfully at me.

"Yes...that would be best. Try to find one without such easy access please. I don't need Montgomery getting

away when Jack gets here," He instructed and faced the other way. "By the way Ms. Towers, if Jack doesn't get here in a couple of days than you'll become my dove. Which should be interesting." With that he disappeared and I stared at the space where he should have been.

"Did you know that would happen?" I asked the former art teacher and he shook his head.

"I had no idea that he liked you," he answered and I hit him in the stomach. It didn't affect him much but he held onto me tighter. "There's no need to struggle now that you're safe."

"To be put in another room? Yeah...that's safe. Really safe. What with Zekan and Shelia here, I'm sure that I can put my past behind me and become the next trophy wife for that Joker," I said sarcastically and he chuckled.

"It could be worse. You could be hated by Zekan and end up being given to the King of Spades," he pointed out and I shivered.

"Why exactly was I in that room again?" I questioned and he shrugged.

"Zekan wanted to see if you could escape...or something to that effect," He replied and I nodded thoughtfully.

"Aren't you two supposed to be pissed off at each other?" Montgomery broke in and we both looked at the panther.

"Right..." he trailed off and I bit back a giggle.

"I hate you, you filthy idiotic moron! I wish that you would die in a hole!" I screamed struggling and his grip tightened.

"Die in a hole? That's not very productive," he replied and started carrying me to the new room.

"And I hate that two faced bastard called Zekan!" I added with a smug smile and Montgomery sniggered behind me.

"Go for it. I'm sure he'll listen to you," he laughed quietly and I scowled.

"Zekan's so terrible that he should go kill himself and have someone stick his remains in a cow and have the cow's milk thrown into a hole! No! They should go in a place that will never be seen again and that wouldn't effect anything! Like...like...a cave! He should go die in a cave!" I ranted and by this point they were both trying to control their amusement. Blasting open a door, he closed it noisily behind him and threw me on the bed. Bursting into laughter the panther and Royal shared a moment of pure entertainment at my antics and I shrugged. That's what I thought of the guy.

"Stay here until Jack, Nil, or I come and get you. If you don't then I'm pretty sure that the other Joker will try to force you to be his dove because of what you were saying earlier. Not that I would mind. I'm almost positive that he would be nicer if he had you for a dove but...I don't think Jack would be too happy," He ordered and I stuck my tongue out at him.

"Go away," I told him and he left the room with a grin.

Author's note: Sorry for the long wait! Don't forget to vote and comment! Thanks for all the support!

Chapter 12

King of Hearts Ch. 12

The room that Frank put me in was pink. I mean so pink that anyone who hated pink would die of a heart attack, kind of pink. To add to the pinkness, it was frilly and really lacey. To a guy it would seem like a very feminine room. To a girl it was just annoying. I mean who would want pink mirrors on their vanity? Plus, the ceiling having hearts on it was a bit much...then again; it was all a bit much considering the lack of any other color. A bed was against the wall facing the door and a vanity with a bench was across from it. Other than that, there was a dresser and two other mirrors on the doors that could contain who knows what...all in pink. Gapping

at the overload of white mixed with red, I didn't notice Montgomery sit next to me until he nudged me with his nose.

"It's Shelia's room," he answered my unspoken question and I shivered.

"Who would have this much pink? It's disturbing," I said and he shrugged.

"I don't even try to get into her head anymore. She's got weird when Jack became her Card. I don't even want to think of what happened after," he replied and I looked at the goose bumps on my arms. I really didn't like that chick.

"Will she come in here?" I asked as the thought occurred to me and I glared at the door.

"Only with another guy. She never steps in here except for sex," he grinned and I shivered. That's not a mental picture that I needed.

"Has Jack..." I started and someone scoffed behind me.

"He wouldn't touch her after she destroyed his life. Plus, if their last meeting was an example than I doubt she'll ever even think of trying to go near him again. Getting you was an act of defiance on her part. Add that to Zekan's note and you've got one angry Victory," A small oriental girl told me and I stared at her long black hair. It was even longer than her height and it trailed behind her like a tail. Snapping out of my fascination with the amazing smoothness of her hair, I frowned.

"What note? What did it say?" I questioned and she shook her head.

"It said something like, 'we have your dove. Come and get her.' Knowing Victory that's probably what he'll do," She reported and I shook my head in surprise. This was getting to be a bit much, even for me.

"Why is he doing this," I mumbled. "Even going so far as to say that he would make me his dove..." A snort of laughter sounded in front of me and I looked for the source of the noise. The girl was doubled over

holding her mouth and she almost appeared to be having a seizure.

"You can laugh out loud...I don't mind," I said wondering if I was right. I was. In the next thirty minutes I heard a laugh that I probably would never hear again considering the circumstances. Then again...I didn't even know this girl.

"Who are you, anyway?" I asked and she managed to compose herself.

"I'm Sakura, the Queen of Clubs. Don't worry I'm on your side," She informed me and I sighed. At this point, I didn't even want to know who was on what side. I just wanted to go home.

"When can I go home?" I probed getting right to the subject and she sat next to Montgomery silently.

"I don't know. If Zekan decides to keep you here than you're basically doomed to be here forever. Or at least until you say you hate him. Which would be interesting, if his powers wouldn't destroy the planet once their unleashed on the world," She admitted and I got up and sat on the vanity bench.

I didn't want to be here. I wanted to be at home getting ready to teach Julius Caesar with Jack making dinner or something. Hey, I would even let Nil help out if he promised not to share what I was going to do. Startled at my own daydream, I glanced up into the pink, frilly mirrors at my reflection. A dark purple splotch marred my complexion and I wondered vaguely how it got there. Reaching up to touch it, I hissed at the pain it brought and pulled my fingers away. Instinctively looking down at them, I stared. The purple had gone onto my fingers. Rubbing at the bruise, I watched as it slowly disappeared and got all over my fingers. What was under the fake bruise was something different altogether...if I could tell what it was. The faintest design was there and no matter how much I leaned forward, I wasn't able to see what it was.

"What did they do to you?" Sakura asked and put a hand on the pattern. A blinding pain shot through my head and I yelped.

"Don't touch!" I said almost incoherent at the feeling of being ripped apart and stumbled off the bench.

Landing solidly on my knees, I cradled my cheek in my hands until the pain went away. Positive that she had hurt me, I looked stood up shakily and walked to the nearest mirror. Purple splotches were sprinkled all over my hands, face, and arms and when I lifted up my shirt to see, they were there too.

"What did you do?" I gasped at her trying not to cry.

"I didn't do anything! All I did was touch your face and then all those marks appeared!" She protested and Montgomery stared at me.

"Sakura, card box," He said softly and she whirled around to him.

"No! That hasn't happened in over a millennia! Why would it happen now?" She glared but I didn't hear them. I was too busy looking at the purple splotches and trying to get them all off. It didn't help much that they were starting to multiply like bacteria.

"Because it is. We have to calm her down. If she doesn't then we both know what'll happen," He warned and she nodded gritting her teeth.

"They won't go away!" I screamed, tears running down my face.

"Look at me," a familiar voice broke through my delirium and I looked up into Jack's face.

"Jack!" I exclaimed and smiled distractedly at him. "The spots...they won't go away."

"Then make them go away," He answered calmly kneeling in front of me. "That's all you have to do is make them go away. If you don't want them then don't have them." This piece of advice was a far cry from what I would have considered good counseling if I had been in my right mind...which I wasn't. So I did as he said. I wished the purple splotches away. The next time I opened my eyes, I didn't see Jack but I didn't have the spots either.

"What happened?" I interrogated the two in the room with me without actually turning around.

"You started going crazy and I had to do something so I created a Victory," Sakura admitted quietly and I covered my face with my hands. This was way too much for me. What happened to the comfort of

having a routine that never changed? What happened to the beauty of just dreaming about Jack and not knowing him?

"I can tell you something to get your mind off of everything," Montgomery growled and I looked over at the panther.

"Yes. We'll tell you about Victory or even Aces if you want us too. Just don't go insane again," Sakura agreed and I turned to face them. Taking a seat on the floor, I leaned against the wall and faced them.

"Tell me about the Aces," I ordered quietly and settled in to listen.

"There are four Aces: Hearts, Spades, Clubs, and Diamonds. However, there hasn't been more than one or two together at the same time in this the millennia," she started out.

"Let me handle this. The Aces powers are considered to be higher than those of the Jokers'. If the four Aces and the two Jokers went face to face, the Jokers would be dead in about a minute. Not saying that if they ever went one on one, the Ace would have some

issues. Just because the Ace is stronger doesn't mean that the Joker can't try to beat him," He began and she wacked him on the paw.

"You're getting off topic. What he's trying to say is that Aces are the most powerful Royals. Usually the Aces would live nice quiet lives because that was in their nature, oddly enough. Aces tend to be silent people or at least intelligent. They were the ones that made the whole Royal system in the first place. Them and the..."She started to say and the panther bit her lightly on the arm. He gave her a warning look and she scowled but nodded.

"In any case, they created the Royals. They taught the original Royals to respect the flow of time and space. If they didn't pay attention to that rule then they were destroyed mercilessly. Eventually the Aces went against their own rule and died by the consequences that happened. Since then, a true Ace rarely appears and even then they don't know that they are such powerful players in our society," She finished and Montgomery nodded.

"How are they different than the Jokers?" I questioned interested. It seems their tactics had worked. I wanted to know more about Aces. Jack was one after all.

"They can travel through time. A couple of the first ones tried to make himself a king and that's how he died. Plus, they're able to create wormholes if they really wanted to. That and anti-matter. That's what one of the other Aces did and he got transported by one of the remaining two to a wormhole, which sucked in the very person who created it. The last primary Ace ended up dying due to strange causes that no one knows about. Although, we all think that he got killed by his dove. They created that system too. The Decision of the Dove. They made it so that the Royals would have someone to answer to and so that they would be controlled by the very people the Aces were trying to protect. Not that it did much, considering what happened to the last Ace," she replied and I nodded. Made as much sense as anything else.

"What happens to the Aces after their found by the Royals?" I asked and the panther snorted.

"We put limiters on them so that they never know what they are. If we hadn't then it would basically be Armageddon. It's probably because Victory's limiter is giving out that they want him to come in. So that they can shove a new one in him. That's even more dangerous than anything else because you would have to take the old one out. Theoretically the limiter would dissolve if it ever stopped working completely but we haven't found much on that. We always just stuck a new one in before the old one died entirely," Montgomery told me and I raised an eyebrow.

"Where did you put it?" I said not knowing if I wanted to know the answer or not.

"In his heart," he answered and I thought back to what he had told me before about his instructor saving his life by pumping his heart. Looks like Jack had been mislead...again.

"You know he blames you for not letting him die," I informed him and Sakura patted his head comfortingly.

"He knows. He just hates that Victory wouldn't accept him as his teacher until he was practically made too," She voiced for him and he rolled his eyes.

"Are you two...?" I trailed off and she nodded. That answers that question.

"What do you mean that he wouldn't accept him?" I returned to the subject at hand and she grimaced.

"He didn't want to be a Royal. One of the main reasons why he was named Victory was because of all the failed suicide attempts that he had made. He just didn't want to live. By that point, Zekan had gotten fed up and told him to either kill himself properly or be taught by Montgomery. Victory tried to kill himself later that night but failed so horribly that he decided to go with the second choice," She scowled unhappily and I gapped at her. Jack had tried to kill himself? This was completely new to me.

"What?" Was the only word I could get out and she nodded.

"That what I said too when I found out. I didn't know someone could fail so many times at trying to die.

That is, until Montgomery told me about him being an Ace. The thing is that you can't kill yourself as an Ace. Your power won't let you die. Another thing that makes Aces and other Royals different," she agreed and I stared dumbly at her for another few seconds. It must have really sucked trying to die so many times and never getting the satisfaction of death.

"Don't worry. He won't try to kill himself now that he's got something to live for," she interrupted my thought and I blinked.

"What do you mean?" I asked curiously. Oh...she was talking about Nil.

"I mean that he's got a dove that not Shelia. Plus, he's got a student that's just like him," she pointed out. She meant me and Nil...that made a better connection with my ego.

When I didn't start talking after a couple of minutes, the two Royals started talking about the "old days". I didn't mind too much. I was more worried about what was happening with Jack. He didn't have anyone to tell him what was going on.

"Is there some way I could talk to Jack?" I blurted out and the two looked at me.

"Not that I know of. Usually, Doves and Royals can talk to each other through telekinesis but you can't reach them when they're in another dimension," Sakura shook her head and I frowned. I needed to talk to him. He needed to know what was going on.

"How do you talk with telekinesis?" I asked stubbornly and the two glanced at each other.

"You just think of them and think about talking to them but I really don't think that it's a good idea if you try to start talking with him. I mean the Jokers could find out and..." she went on but I ignored her. It didn't matter if the Jokers found out but I didn't want them to know what I was talking to Jack about so just in case I thought of Jack and me in my classroom at school. I thought about his changing hair, his pupil less eyes, his tan skin, his tattoos, everything to the last detail of what I could remember about him.

"Jack," I said to the imaginary man and closed my eyes to focus better. Blocking out everything else, I focused solely on him and the room.

"Jack," I repeated and this time the imaginary man grinned.

"Hello Ms. Towers, how can I help you?" Jack joked. Easy as pie.

Author's note: Thanks for the support everyone! Don't forget to vote and comment!

Chapter 13

King of Hearts Ch. 13

"Jack! Are you really there?" I questioned more to myself then to him but he nodded reassuringly.

"Yeah but I always thought that you couldn't communicate with your Dove when you're in another dimension," he said thoughtfully and I shrugged.

"It might have something to do with you being an Ace," I suggested and he stared at me shocked.

"What?" He said disbelieving.

"Yeah, Zekan told me himself. He and Shelia," I replied frowning. He really didn't know.

"How long have I been gone?" He interrogated alarmed and my frown turned into a scowl.

"I have no idea. I don't know how long they had me drugged," I admitted and angry imprinted itself on his face.

"Drugged?" He barked and I shrank from the noise. Maybe this wasn't such a good idea...

"Yeah because they didn't want me to struggle when they kidnapped me," I voiced and his face turned white.

"Kidnapped?" He whispered and a cold shiver ran up my spine. This really wasn't a good idea.

"Because they wanted you to come back so you could have another limiter put in you so that you don't turn into an Ace," I whimpered and he was in front of me before I even finished.

"Are you telling me, that they drugged and kidnapped you all to make sure that I didn't receive the power that would have made me the most powerful Royal alive?" He said so softly that I could barely hear the

question and I backed up. He grabbed my arm in a vice like grip and stopped me from moving.

"Yes and you're hurting me," I whispered and he quickly let go. Running a hand through his suddenly short hair, he muttered something under his breath that I wasn't able to catch.

"Jack...?" I started to say and he looked over at me. His eyes were pupil less again and the hanging hearts on his face were slowly fading. Instead a deep purple bruise was surfacing on the side of his neck and I stared at it. It reminded me of the purple splotches that I had had on my skin. Walking over to him, I gently touched the bruise and he flinched.

"What are you doing?" he hissed at me and I rubbed the purple bruise away. By the time I had finished, the tattoos on his face were gone and his neck was covered in a single tattoo that had a giant heart engulfing half of his neck and the other half was covered by the word "Ace" that was strung out and connected to the heart by the bottom of the first line of the "A" stabbing itself into the side of the heart.

That seemed to connect to the end of the "e" that went into the heart on the other side.

Relief filled me. It was odd how I felt relief when I should have been feeling terror and not only that but the feeling of knowing him was overwhelming.

"Ace," I murmured and stroked the tattoo almost possessively and I heard him gasp at the touch.

"What are you doing?" He mumbled and I traced the outline of the heart as I looked into his face.

"I'm looking at your tattoo Jack," I said almost incoherently. The feeling of nostalgia was amazing. I could feel this all day and never want to leave.

"My name is Ace. Ace Victory Heart," a deeper voice said and I blinked. The feeling I had was shattered by the sudden declaration. His eyes had turned to a beautiful blood red and his hair had gone the exact same shade.

"You are my Royal, Jack Victory," I argued and he nodded his head.

"As you wish, my dove," he whispered and turned his head to kiss my palm. A small shiver that had nothing to do with the air conditioner went down my back and I smiled at him.

"Another time Jack. Where's Nil?" I questioned and his face grew alert at the mention of his student. Almost at once, the teenager appeared sitting calmly at his desk in the back row.

"Ms. Towers," He greeted me happily and I grinned at him.

"Hey Nil! Have you had a tough time with Jack?" I questioned and his gaze locked with the man behind me. A mature look crossed his face with a feeling that I couldn't place and then his features straightened out.

"It's not so bad once you get used to it. I really learned a lot from him. Although...I can see that we both have the same tattoo now," he spoke and pulled down the collar of his shirt to reveal a marking in the same manner of Jack's except instead of a heart it was a spade with the word Ace attached neatly around his neck. His features had changed as well.

Now his face was lighter and his eyes and hair were a dark deep black. The feeling of nostalgia was slowly coming back and I leaned forward to touch Nil's new mark. The same audible hiss erupted from his lips as Jack had done and I jerked away. The tattoo had gotten darker.

"Sorry, I don't know what I was thinking," I apologized putting my hands in my pockets and found two cards in them, the cards had transformed. Instead of the J and K in the corners, there was a giant A with a round circle in the middle that would probably hold their portrait when they entered their respective card.

"Jack, I still have them," I said holding up the cards and a smile flickered on his changed features.

"I'm glad that you do, my dove," He said calmly and I frowned. He didn't seem like Jack. He seemed more like that Zekan than anything. I wanted my Jack back.

"Jack, I want you're old personality back," I told him pointedly and he blinked.

"What for?" He questioned and I scowled at him.

"You acted human. Now you're like some red doomsday device," I mumbled and a loud laugh exploded from the man in front of me.

"It seems that my Ace personality didn't work out like I planned it would," Jack told me and I hit him lightly on the arm.

"Of course it didn't! Why would I like a Jack like that?" I protested and he grinned at me.

"I don't know. You always seem to think that I need to grow up a little," he shrugged and I bit my lip to keep from laughing. He may need to grow up a little but I didn't need him acting like he was god or something.

"We might need to get back to the problem at hand," Nil interrupted our suddenly cheerful atmosphere and I sighed.

"Where are you now?" Jack asked turning serious.

"In Shelia's room. Did she always like pink?" I replied and a grimace passed over his face.

"She thought that guys liked to see pink when they were having sex," he muttered and ran a hand through his hair again.

"Is that hard to get out of?" Nil questioned and I glanced at Jack.

"Well?" I asked and a dark look came over his face.

"If they're there to catch me than it is," he spat.

"They are after me too. I'm an Ace you know," he interjected into his mentor's growing sense of dread. The sentence sparked an idea in my mind.

"How well did Jack teach you? Are you able to go against him?" I voiced excitedly and Nil examined me warily.

"Yeah, I ended up beating his butt. Why?"

"I have an idea. Are you willing to be the bait?" I questioned and he nodded without hesitation. "Good. Now listen up..."

After fine tuning my plan and saying good bye to Jack and Nil, I retreated from the safety of my classroom. Opening my eyes to the pink frilliness of Shelia's

room, I searched for Montgomery and Sakura. They were staring at me.

"What's wrong?" I asked them and they just continued looking at me. It was getting creepy at this point so I glanced over at my reflection to see what was so weird. Nothing that I could tell was different. Which reminded me...

"Montgomery, Jack says he's sorry for turning you into a panther. He's really happy that you're alive," I smiled at him and the giant cat's face softened from its shock.

"I'm glad. How were you able to talk to him?" he purred calmly and I rubbed my nose.

"Where there's a will there's a way I suppose," I grinned and his whiskers twitched.

"I see..." He trailed off and I leaned against the wall to wait for the first phase of our plan to start.

Author's note: Sorry this one's short but the next one's going to be a bit long so it all evens out...right? Thanks for the comments! Keep commenting! I might just post sooner. :D

Chapter 14

King of Hearts Ch. 14

Phase one started quickly like I had planned. I hated waiting around. It consisted of a single red rope that basically wrapped itself around me and dragged me through the door and out of the room.

"What is that?" I heard Sakura exclaim behind as I slid through the corridor. Leaning backwards (which was no easy feat) I looked behind me and saw the two Royals running after me. Truthfully, it was a lot of fun to be dragged like this. Jack had taken every measure of precaution to ensure that I wouldn't get hurt so it was more like a roller coaster ride than anything. Of course they didn't know that so when I

started screaming when I saw the stairs they mistook it for terror.

"Hold on! We'll get you out of this," Montgomery roared and I had to stifle a laugh. This really was way too much fun.

Flying down the stairs, the rope pulled me around a tight curve and I bounced off the wall unharmed.

"Ow!" I protested loudly and tried to get a grip on the wall. I succeeded and saw the two at the foot of the stairs searching for me.

"Montgomery!" I waved with one hand and the rope pulled me hard and I let go. After being dragged for a few more minutes, Zekan showed up a few feet in front of me. Catching me easily, he cut the rope and it dropped limply to the floor. Time for phase two.

"I was so scared!" I cried into his suit and clung to him. He obviously had no idea what to do so he patted me on the back awkwardly. Turning my tear stained face up to him, I grabbed him around the neck and kissed him. At this point, Zekan was confused. I didn't know how I knew but I did. It

might have been the fact that he accepted the kiss or even the fact that he held on a bit longer than he should've but it wasn't a good thing either way. Ending the kiss, I pulled away shyly and looked at him through lowered eye lids.

"I'm sorry for slapping you before," I said softly and he stared at me bewildered. He probably thought I had Stockholm's Syndrome or something. I guess it didn't matter because the moment he noticed the two behind me his face went back to its original coldness.

"What happened?" he asked not unkindly and I resisted the urge to roll my eyes. Yes, he was like every other male.

"That rope came out of nowhere and it twisted around me. Then I was dragged from my room!" I answered truthfully. That was what happened after all. Zekan examined my face, probably looking for any tricks but when he saw that I was telling the truth he turned to look for the rope. Luckily, Nil had gotten it away in time while I had the three of them distracted. Then again, who wouldn't be distracted by

a woman kissing a man that she had sworn to kill earlier that day? I know I would be.

"Where's the rope?" Sakura asked suspiciously and I stared at her stone faced. She knew something was up...she just didn't know what.

"Help me distract him," I said to her without saying a word in my desperation to not get caught and her eyes widened a fraction of a centimeter. Turning back to Zekan, I smiled flirtatiously at him but he wasn't looking at me. His eye seemed to be staring past my shoulder and I turned around to see what he was so enraptured by. Shelia was walking towards him in a long plantation dress and she was grinning at him. Behind her she held the hand on a small boy with a teddy bear wrapped in his arms.

"I found him," she told him and the little boy stared off into space.

"Where?" he demanded and pushed me to the side. That was one way to distract him.

"Isn't he adorable?" she whispered into my ear and I whirled around to face Shelia standing behind me.

"Who is he?" I questioned belligerently and her grin widened.

"Zekan's son, the only hope for the future of our race. He's an ace. The Ace of Diamonds. Can you believe it? How ironic..." She drifted off when she saw that the child was looking at her and then his eyes slid to me. We examined each other for a long moment before the small boy smiled warmly at me. He ran around his father and wrapped his small arms around my thigh.

"She is mine," he said clearly and I reached down and picked him up. His blonde curls were falling softly in his face and his bright gray eyes stared seriously from behind them. The dark haired teddy bear only accented his extremely pale skin and I noticed that his neck was covered up. Frowning, I pulled back his scarf and saw the tattoo that was underneath it. A diamond was attached to the word "ace" with chains instead of the word going straight into the diamond. The sense of nostalgia came back over me and I leaned heavily against the wall.

Leaning forward, I gently kissed the diamond and pulled back sharply as he let out a soft gasp.

"I'm sorry. Are you okay?" I asked worriedly and he hugged me happily.

"I've been waiting for you," he whispered quietly and I frowned. Waiting for me? Was he with Zekan or did he know that I was trying to escape? My paranoia at that time was trying it's hardest to get control of me but I beat it down. There was no need for useless conclusions, especially when they were about a small boy like this.

"How old are you?" I asked in a motherly voice and he pulled back to look fully at me.

"I'm turning six this year," he answered quietly and I smiled.

"You're getting old aren't you?" I teased and his grin was brilliant.

"Not as old as I should be," He replied, throwing me off and I blinked. This reminded me...I needed to complete phase two. This boy...I wanted him to come with me.

"Zekan, I love Jack," I said seriously turning to the Joker and he stared at me for a long moment.

"You're point? I can have you whether you love Victory or not," he rebuked icily and I shrugged.

"True, but that means that you can't fully have me. Jack would get in your way at every turn," I pointed out and he glared at me. Zekan's son reached up and put his hand over my eyes.

"Victory? Do you love him that much?" The small boy said and I nodded into his hand.

"Yes. Yes, I do," I informed him and he removed his hand.

"Then I'll help you meet him again," He briefed me before jumping out of my arms and landing calmly on the floor. Handing me his teddy bear, he reached out and touched the wall. His small hand disappeared into the wall and he seemed to grope for something before he found it. With a swift motion, he pulled his hand out and Jack's form followed.

Jack looked at the group and finally glanced at me.

"Why are you here?" He questioned frowning and I blinked this wasn't Jack...then who was it? It looked just like Jack...except this Jack still had the tattoos on his cheeks.

"Jack?" I said uncertainly and the small boy walked over to me. Taking the teddy bear out of my hands he scowled at me.

"Why aren't you going to him? Kyle just got him for you," the boy said talking about himself in third person and I bit my lip.

"I don't think this is Jack," I admitted and the boy stared at the clone copy of Victory and nodded.

"You're right. It isn't," He agreed and raised a hand. A giant ball of fire came out of his hand and set the clone aflame. Shocked, I looked from the burning form of the identical Fake Jack to "Kyle". Leaning against one of the columns, I put a hand to my forehead. What have I gotten myself into? Who was this boy anyway? I know he's Zekan's son but this is a bit overboard even for Zekan himself.

"I don't think that's how you get rid of a clone," A dry voice said from behind me and warm arms wrapped around my waist. Looking up, I saw Jack's face including the Ace tattoo.

"Hide it," I murmured into his neck as I turned to hug him and he blinked. The tattoo was replaced with the King tats and I sighed in relief. Hopefully, no one notice.

"So you're the one she loves so much," Kyle said to himself and I sighed. At this point I didn't care. The plan hadn't been completely ruined. Hopefully, we could get out of here without Nil coming.

"Yep and it's going to stay that way with the both of them," Nil's voice came from behind Jack and I sighed again. So much for that idea.

"Who are you?" Kyle asked and walked past us. I watched the two of them regard each other and smiled when Nil put out his hand.

"Jack of Spades," he introduced himself and the smaller boy took his hand calmly.

"Ace of Diamonds, but you can call me Kyle," He told the teenager and the older guy nodded seriously.

"I'm Nil," he responded letting go of Kyle's hand and I smiled into Jack's sleeve.

"That's so cute," I thought to him and he looked down at me bewildered.

"You can think of cute things at a time like this?" he asked incredulous and I shrugged.

"Not my fault," I muttered and giggled. It did remind me what was going on though.

"Sorry Zekan, I don't like you," I informed him and the Joker turned to us. He didn't seem to be listening and I covered my mouth startled as a small bug came out of his ear.

"Now this is a nice little gathering," a snicker rang through the hallway and we all looked for the owner.

"Where are you?" I said sharply and a clocked figure came down from the ceiling.

"Sorry but that's disclosed information," a happy voice replied from under the hood and the figure

grabbed the Joker. "I'm sorry for the distractions my doll has caused. I'll make sure that he won't interfere with you guys next time. Oh and Kyle, don't worry. He's not actually you're father." With that startling news, the unknown person vanished with Zekan and we were left staring at the spot where they had disappeared.

"So does anyone know who that was?" I asked after a long moment and Jack moved his arms from around me.

"No but it looks like our main problem is gone so I guess its ok for us to leave," he said grimly and I nodded.

"Nil, ready?" I asked and walked over to Kyle. Picking him up, I led my group out the door.

"Sorry Kyle but I'm taking you with me," I informed him and his thin shoulders shrugged.

"I would have gone with you anyway," He replied and I smiled. I had a feeling.

"I'm just glad that we get to go home," Nil muttered and I laughed.

"That I can agree too," I giggled. Maybe I could finally get some sleep.

Author's note: Sorry it took so long! Don't worry, it's not over yet! Don't forget to vote and comment! Thanks!

Chapter 15

King of Hearts Ch. 15

I woke up to the smell of cookies and vanilla. It was a wonderful scent to smell in the morning. A smile stretched itself across my face as I thought about how one would taste with my coffee. It was a divine thought. Jumping out of bed, I quickly pulled on a robe and made my way towards the kitchen. The three Aces were sitting quietly at the table not talking. The silence between them wasn't heavy or tense. It just was. Like a group of close friends who ran out of things to talk about after a long day at work and all they wanted to do was be together. As I observed the three males, a cup of coffee made itself and a cookie put itself on a plate and floated to my

side. Glancing down, I let their weight fall into my hands and I sat down at the table.

"Sweet dreams?" Jack asked munching on a cookie and I smiled at him over my mug.

"Yeah, the best," I agreed taking a sip. Made to perfection.

"We need to find out who that guy was," Nil interrupted my brief moment of happiness and I sighed. Back into the world of insanity. It was nice while it lasted.

"Why?" I asked taking the bait. Might as well know why I'm getting myself into something.

"He took away Zekan and called him his 'doll'. I don't know about you but that's straight out weird. I mean to have a fake Joker? Then the real ones got to be out there somewhere and there's three Aces...the last time that's happened was when the Aces created the Royals, which was basically over a millennium ago," Nil began and Kyle nodded his cookie crumbed face.

"It's closer to two or three millennium," Kyle interjected and Jack sat back in his chair. He had been through this before apparently.

"And?" I questioned and dipped the cookie in my coffee.

"And you can't have only three of them without four. You can only have even numbers in with Royals. Well...except for the Card Box..." the teen trailed off as I chomped on my caffeine soaked biscuit. It really was good.

"So? You think that the last Ace is alive?" I responded to the drawn out silence and he nodded.

"Yes. I mean even if the last Ace wasn't alive then he'd be born soon," he shrugged.

"How are you so sure that it's a guy?" I replied miffed.

"All the Aces are men. That's just how it is," he mumbled flustered and I sighed. There wasn't any point on me getting on his case just because I was agitated at the system.

"So how does this connect with the clocked person?" I asked and he grinned at me.

"That's easy. He made Zekan so we think that he's the other Ace," he answered and I choked.

"So you want to go looking for a guy that you aren't even sure exists?" I said putting down my empty mug and wiped my face. This was getting way too out of hand. I didn't want to get into anything after I had just gotten away. Maybe, I could actually teach now, without all the interruptions from the Music Department. Then again...I had enjoyed him coming to my class randomly and he did write me a poem...that was nice.

"I'm positive that he exists! I've gone over the entire event of what happened and the only way that Zekan would have been taken away like it is if that guy had been an Ace!" Nil protested throwing his chair back and slammed his palms on the table.

"Or if Zekan was tricking us," I pointed out and he glared at me.

"What reason would he have to trick us?" Jack voiced finally and I turned to him. He looked grim and unhappy as he stared back at me. Raising an eyebrow, I waited for him to go on.

"Well," He started shifting in his chair. "It plays out like this. Zekan didn't like to be tricked and even if he was a doll he wouldn't trick people unless he absolutely had to. He tricked me because he didn't want me to get any stronger and over power him. That's simple but if another Ace were to control him then maybe the Ace of Clubs wants to be the only Ace." Mulling it over, I rubbed my nose thoughtfully.

"No...I don't think that's it. Remember how he said that Zekan got in our way? I don't think that that cloaked guy didn't really care about our antics. It seems more like he didn't want to be with us at all. So why did he come back for his 'doll'? It doesn't make sense," I shook my head and crossed my arms on the table.

"Maybe he wanted a friend? I know I'd be lonely without Mr. Valentine," Kyle told us holding up his teddy bear. The thought of Frankenstein behind the

exiled merchant's house popped into my head and I stared at the small boy.

"Well that's why the Aces created the Royals. They got sick of each other and wanted to be with people like themselves. They're kind of...morals I think he said," the boy nodded to himself and took a huge bite out of a cookie.

"Who said?" I demanded scratching an itch on my arm and glanced down to look at the spot. A small purplish bruise was forming and I stared at it willing it to go away.

"The dead Aces. I can talk to them," he enlightened us and I nodded thoughtfully not really paying attention. Looking back down at my arm, I saw that the spot was gone and I bit back a sigh of relief. Then realizing what he said my eyes widened as I inspected the younger boy in front of me. His innocent eyes watched my reaction with unveiled amusement and a happy smile was painted on his lips.

"You talk to ghosts," I repeated flatly and he pouted.

"They prefer to be called celestial spirits," he stated bluntly.

"Fine, Celestial Spirits," I corrected myself and put my face in my hands. "How can you talk to them?"

"All the Diamonds can talk to them. We're like crystal balls. We see the future and can talk to dead people," he replied hugging his teddy bear and I stared at him, a small boy who can talk to ghosts. Is there anything normal left?

"Well...if you can do that then what can Nil and Jack do?" I questioned and he grinned at me.

"Nil is a Spade so he can...he's a strategist and he can work really well with electronics. He just doesn't know it yet because he doesn't like going on computers too much. They bother him," He informed me and Nil glared at him.

"Just because I don't like computers, doesn't mean that you have to be so belligerent about it," Nil scolded the younger Ace and the boy stuck his tongue out.

"What can Jack do?" I broke in completely ignoring the subject of discussion beside me. Jack didn't say anything though and got up, picking up my coffee mug on the way. I watched as the two boys bickered over what he should be able to do but I wasn't listening. Jack, if anything, seemed to be thinking about something that was bothering him.

"What's wrong?" I thought to him and his shoulders tensed up. He stirred the milk in my coffee without answering me and he avoided my eyes as he turned around. Putting the beverage in front of me, he sat down not looking at me.

"Boys, could you two go find a book that I've been looking around for awhile? It's called the lord of the flies. I can't find it around my house. Could you two go look for it?" I ordered with a benign smile and they looked at each other.

"Sure but...don't you need Shakespeare's Macbeth too?" Nil questioned with a straight face and I nodded. Pulling the younger Ace up by the hand, the two of them started talking and left the apartment in high spirits.

"Hey, Jack, what's wrong?" I asked finally after they left and turned to him. His eyes were closed as if he was sleeping but the scowl on his face gave him away.

"Jack, answer me," I pleaded and touched his crossed arms lightly. His eyes opened slightly and they peered at me through lowered lids. He looked like he needed someone to listen.

"Jack, tell me what's wrong," I begged finally, pulling his hands into mine and I looked at how they engulfed my hands. They really were huge. That's when I spotted another purple splotch on the inside of my fingertip. Why wouldn't they go away? Suddenly he pulled my hand to his face and he stared at the spot with an intensity that would have scorched the South Pole.

"This is what's bothering me," He said gruffly pointing at the spot and I stared at him wide eyed.

"Why would that bother you? It's just a bruise," I lied and he shook his head.

"We both know that's not just a bruise," he argued and deliberately put my hand to his tattoo. Nostalgia flooded my systems and I felt buried memories try to break through.

"Do you get it? You can't touch my tattoo without pain and that's got to mean something. I don't know what it means but it has something to do with those purple dots that keep appearing on your skin. When did you first get them?" he interrogated and I shrank from his examination.

"Why are you so worried about it?" I voiced hesitantly and he threw my hand away from him.

"There's a disease that comes after royals that starts out with purple splotches. It takes away all of their powers and slowly drains them of their life. It's terrible and I've only seen it happen to a couple of Royals. They called it the royal plague because once one person has it then all the Royals are infected until only one or two are left and then the Royals are able to build their numbers back up and it strikes again. It hasn't hit in awhile though and we're due

for it," he explained aggravated and leaned his hands on the kitchen counter his back to me.

"You think...I have it?" I gasped shocked and he glanced over at me.

"I...don't know. I've only seen the symptoms and never got close enough for a second encounter. If you have it that means you're a royal but if those really are bruises that just appear randomly it could the work of a club. They're illusionists and they like being magicians. It could be the work of a club. That'd be a lot safer than the disease but I just don't know," He shook his head and he shrugged his shoulders. On instinct, I was up and by his side in seconds and I was about to touch him when I remembered what he said about the disease.

"Is there a cure?" I questioned and he finally looked me in the face.

"Only one but we need the other Ace. Hey, don't worry. Until we discover that it is the disease, we're going to assume that it's a Club making all the fuss for attention from an Ace's dove. You are the only Ace Dove out there after all," he said and reached up

to push a hair away from my face, letting his hand linger on my cheek. He seemed determined to ignore the Royal Plague and I could see that it would be useless to try to stay away from him. Sighing, I reached up and covered his hand with mine.

"I don't want you to die," I told him pointedly but he ignored me by kissing me lightly.

"Good. Then that means I'm not so bad after all," he teased and I rolled my eyes. Honestly, what this man could get away with.

"We found the books!" Nil yelled a bit too loudly and I pulled our hands from my face. I still held onto his hand though and he threaded his fingers in mine.

"Be nice," I muttered under my breath and he chuckled.

"Only you could turn my mood around so easily. You should be a therapist," He murmured into my ear and I grinned. I couldn't see myself as one of them if hell actually did freeze over.

"Thanks guys," I said as the two entered the room carrying a plastic bag with a couple of books inside. I

took it with my free hand and put it on the counter behind me.

"So tell me again why we should look for this guy," I reverted back to the former subject and Nil nodded.

"Because he could tell us where the real Joker is and we could make a better government for the Royals. Sounds good right? After all, if we have all the Aces then we'll be able to protect the non-Royals from everything. That was our original job after all," He said bluntly and I nodded. It sounded good and it's not like I had anything else to do. School could wait...for now.

"Well, I suppose it should be fine but we need to find out who he is first," I said and Jack squeezed my hand.

"I know that, Ms. Towers," He whispered in my ear and I raised a questioning eyebrow at him.

"His name's Lucky. At least that's what his card name is. I'm pretty sure that he's only been lucky once or twice though and it never mattered much him. By lucky, I mean in situations and things like that. Not

the other kind of lucky," he clarified and Kyle gave him an odd look.

"There's another kind of lucky?" He questioned and I snorted. I loved little kids for this one reason.

"You know he's around thirty, right?" he thought to me and I stopped laughing and looked at him suspiciously.

"No he's not! There's no way!" I protested and he nodded. Touching his forehead to mine, a felt a soft ripple in my brain and I heard Kyle's thoughts.

"They look weird like that. Don't be mean Uncle Nicky. It's not like they can help being the most powerful couple right now. It's not their fault...stop looking in my brain, Victory. It's not nice," He scolded him and Jack pulled away from me.

"That didn't tell me anything," I informed him and he pressed his lips to my forehead.

"Because he knew you were listening. He didn't want you to stop treating him like a child. He likes the innocent attention," he sent to me and I nodded.

"So Hearts are mind readers?" I concluded and he smirked.

"That and we have the ability to lead others but we don't normally do it. We're what you would call the kings of the kings. Since the Jokers take over we don't have much of a job and we don't mind. That's life. Nil and Kyle want me to be the new ruler of the Royals but I shot them down. What do you think?" he questioned and I smiled up at him.

"It'd be fun. I like doing that kind of thing," I agreed with the opposition and he sniggered.

"Who said that you would be with me?" he teased and I slapped his shoulder.

"Right and who's going to get you out of trouble?" I asked and he grinned.

"Says the woman who just got rescued from the Royal household just two days ago," he smirked and my smile froze.

"I've been asleep for two days?" I exclaimed and the Aces nodded.

"Yeah, you were really tired," Kyle nodded hugging Mr. Valentine.

"We couldn't wake you up. This guy stayed with you the entire time," Nil said and pointed at Jack. I smiled at Jack. He smiled back and squeezed my hand.

Author's note: Here you go! Thanks for the support! Don't forget to vote and comment!!! Thanks!!!!

Chapter 16

King of Hearts Ch. 16

"How do you find somebody anyway?" I asked the next day as we lounged around my living room.

"I could read their minds," Jack offered.

"I could ask the celestial spirits to look for him," Kyle suggested.

"I could pattern his movements and see where he would go next from what we know about him," Nil turned a page in his book and I stared at the three of them. Why did I have three people who could have found the guy already being lazy?

"It's our nature," Jack replied to my unspoken question and I slapped his arm.

"Alright, the first one who finds him gets a prize," I said agitated. I needed to stir them up somehow.

"What kind of prize?" Kyle questioned curious and three pairs of eyes landed on me. Well this was awkward. I had no idea what to give them....

"Kyle, you'd get a new teddy bear. Nil, you'd get a special edition of a one of my favorite books signed by the author. Jack...um...you'd get a date with me, without anything bad happening this time," I informed them and within three seconds there wasn't anyone besides me in the apartment. "Well that's special." A chuckle escaped my lips and I stood up. As I straightened up the messy room, I thought of the last time they left me alone and I hoped that I wouldn't get ambushed again.

"Having a bit of trouble being ambushed by royals, darling?" a smooth voice said from behind me and I whirled around to come face to face with a very rich looking woman. High heels, tailored suit, diamond

jewelry, complete with the fur coat stood in front of me.

"I don't mean to be rude but who are you?" I said keeping my distance and the red headed woman smiled at me. It, oddly enough, did go up to her green eyes with amusement.

"Hearts, darling. Queen of hearts," She graciously told me.

"Oh...I'm Mina Towers. It's nice to meet you," I said putting out my hand and she took it, her smile widening and I blinked. She didn't look like she was about to kidnap me.

"I'm not. I have no purpose to kidnap you. No, I just wanted to introduce myself. I saw that you had become the Dove of an Ace and I wanted to say hello. I have to admit, you're not what I expected," Her calm voice weaved through the air and the hairs on the back of my neck stood up. Something was off about this woman and I was hoping it wasn't anything too bad. I was tired of having to rely on Jack for help.

"Why are you really here? You wouldn't come just because I'm the Dove of an Ace. Tell me the real reason," I demanded and the woman's smile disappeared.

"So frank! Who knew the little dove had the voice of an eagle? Interesting. I'm here because I feel like it. I don't need a reason to see you do I?" She responded still pretending and I held back a sigh. I didn't need this right now.

"Look, I know you didn't come here just to say hi. You can hide behind you're fur coat and smooth voice all you want to but do it outside of my house," I instructed her and she flopped on the couch in an unladylike way. Startled, I was about to ask what she was doing before the fur coat and diamonds melted into her skin. Her body warped and before me was an average woman in jeans and a casual shirt.

"I hate pretending anyway," she sighed and slouched on the couch.

"Are you really the Queen of Hearts? I thought only clubs could do that," I interrogated and she grinned at me.

"Only clubs can do that," a much quieter voice said from beside the girl and I looked at the man standing beside her. He had dark everything. He could probably fade into the shadows if he needed to.

"And you are?" I said wearily. Why did Jack leave me alone again? To go get a club? If he had waited a few minutes...they would have come to him.

"I'm the Jack of Clubs. My name is Shade. You may call me Kieran," he said softly and I had to lean in to hear him.

"And your name?" I asked the girl and she shrugged.

"My name's Dance. You can call me Erin," she said cheerfully and I sighed. The names some of these Royals came up with. Dance? Really?

"Have you seen me dance?" She piped up and I shook my head. Her green eyes widened shoving her eyebrows into her fiery hair and into her crown tattoo that pronounced she was a queen.

"Then you should watch me," She grinned and pushed me onto the couch. The dark man sat next to me without so much of the rustling of his clothes.

"Would you like some music?" He suggested and she nodded wildly.

"That would be great," she said enthusiastically and a smile tugged at the edges of his lips. Soft slow music started up from nowhere and it surrounded my senses.

"You're going to like this," He said calmly to me and I looked over at him. He was watching the Queen like an idol and I smiled. He was probably biased.

There are very few ways to describe how she moved. I could say she was like water with the liquidation she had with her movements. I could say that she was like a tiger with her litheness. I could say that she looked like a goddess with the way she entranced her audience. However, I can't say any of that because she was all of it. She moved like nothing else on this earth. Her dance made tears come to my eyes and a smile to my lips. It may sound cheesy but if you saw the way she moved you would agree with me. The instant she stopped I regretted her lack of movement.

"So you see why I'm called dance?" she said not even panting and I nodded wiping my face. A white handkerchief appeared from under my nose and I took it from Kieran.

"Thanks," I whispered and wiped the salty tears from my skin. It took me a moment before I could speak again.

"Yeah I see. I just wish that I could learn how to move that way," I admitted and she grinned happily at me and clapped her hands together.

"I can teach you!" she exclaimed and I smiled woefully.

"I don't know. I mean I'm just not able to..." I began and she pulled me to my feet and placed her hands on my arms and raised them to the sky.

"Palms flat! We're going to do the basics first! If I'm going to teach you, then you need to stop doubting yourself. That's the only way you can dance perfectly!" She scolded and I gapped at her astounded.

"Ready?" she asked and spread out her arms and motioned for me to mimic her. "Now, make sure you're back's straight!" The day past quickly with me being distracted by the Hearts Queen. By the end of the day, my body hurt in places that I didn't even know existed but I was happily tired and grinned at my new found friends from the couch.

"Why did you approach me with that weird costume anyway?" I asked taking a gulp of water. Who knew water could taste this good?

"I heard that you had gone up against one of the Jokers and you won. I didn't want you to think lightly of me, so I dressed like that. Kieran thought I was pretty stupid to do it too but I never listen to him anyway," she answered and I threw a pitying glance over at the Club. How they came to be friends was beyond me. The man wasn't paying much attention to us. He seemed to be concentrating on something far away and I looked to what his eyes were engrossed with. He was staring at my baby grand piano, hungrily and I smiled at his curiosity.

"You can play it if you want," I gestured towards the instrument. He didn't need any further encouragement. He shot up and practically ran over to the piano and touched it gently.

"The last time I played was on a harpsichord," he muttered to himself and ran his hands along the deep black wood of the lid.

"Well, why don't you play this one? It'll make you smile," I requested and his eyes lifted to mine and he nodded. Sitting carefully on the bench, he opened the piano lid gingerly and laid his fingertips lightly on the keys. He almost seemed to be waiting for something to tell him to start but we waited patiently. His eyes sought mine again and he started playing. Beethoven's Fur Elise filled the room and I sighed. It was my favorite piece by Beethoven. That and Ode to Joy but that's just me. One song slipped gently into another and he played an intense orchestra piece by Bach. He then moved back into Beethoven. I wasn't able to focus on anything but his music and I listen to it with a smile. He loved making music and you could tell that by his easy precision of the notes and

perfection in the way he presented pieces. I genuinely wished that he would keep playing when Jack appeared next to me and leaned against my shoulder. He was exhausted and he soon fell asleep to the gentle music that Kieran played so beautifully.

"Don't move," was his last thought to me before he slipped into dreamland and I kissed him gently on the cheek.

"I won't," I promised and settled in to listen to the music of the night.

I don't know how long Kieran played or even if I fell asleep between songs but I did know that when I glanced over at Erin she was sleeping too. His last song ended as I looked back at him and he turned to me.

"The dawn is approaching," he told me and I looked out of the window behind him. It was true. The very first rays of the new day were uncurling themselves into the sleepy night. The dark man examined me as I noted the interference with the music. The air felt empty without him playing and I had to hold back a demand that he start again.

"You must be tired after playing all night," I said softly so I didn't wake Jack or Erin.

"Not particularly. I'm an insomniac, so I don't sleep much after all. I haven't played in over two..." he trailed off.

"Two years?" I finished for him and he shook his head.

"Two hundred years. I had almost forgotten why I stopped playing in the first place," he corrected and I stopped myself from gasping.

"Why did you stop?" I asked just to satisfy my own curiosity and his pure black eyes stared into my soul.

"I stopped when I became a Royal. I was told that for Clubs smoke and mirrors are all I needed to know. So that's what I learned," he replied and I shook my head.

"I don't believe you," I informed him and a smile pulled his lips up almost unconsciously.

"I'm glad you don't because that's not a very good reason for me to quit when I loved it so much," he agreed and I nodded. It was a pretty bad reason.

"So why did you stop?" I repeated and he scowled at my question.

"I stopped because I swore I wouldn't start until I took my revenge on the man who killed my sister," he answered and I gapped at him.

"Did you ever find him?" I asked and he nodded.

"A couple of years after I started my search. He died in an insane asylum on the west coast of England. He ended up dying due to torture," he told me and I winced. My hand sought Jack's and he snuggled closer to me when I wrapped his hand in my much smaller ones.

"Why didn't you start playing after that?" I questioned and he shrugged.

"I didn't feel the music. I didn't feel the need for it. It was...useless for me to play. I didn't love it the same way I did back then," he explained.

"What made you start playing today?" I asked and he glanced at the girl on the sofa.

"I don't do a lot without her help. She's always with me. I met her at a dancing club on the outskirts of the town I was staying in and when I saw her dance, I was captivated. I learned a bit later that she was a Royal the same as me and she ended up becoming my dove. I don't know how we got through the last few years together. We've just been...I don't know. But when she saw you're admiration for her dancing, which is nothing new let me assure you, it seemed to strike a chord in her. A few people have asked her to teach them but she always refused them knowing that they would never master her way of dancing. I don't know what she saw in you but she decided to teach you and she looked so happy when she taught you. I'm surprised that she hadn't tried to teach before. In any case, I know what she felt when you asked me to play the piano. It was the feeling of being completely accepted without any questions. You don't know our pasts. You don't even know who we could be. You just know what's put in front of you and you deal with that. Sure people do it every day, but you

do it with...I don't know how to put it. You're just special to the both of us and we're not really sure why," he ended folding his arms around himself and I smiled at him.

"I'm glad that I could hear you're music," I commented and he smiled at me. A fully fledged brilliant smile that could take an angel's breath away. We sat in silence for a moment before he said something that I didn't quite catch.

"You're looking for the Ace of Clubs right?" He repeated.

"Yeah, how did you know?" I questioned and he gestured at Erin.

"She read his mind and then told me. She wants me to tell you a couple of things about him. She wants to help you in any case," He answered and I rubbed my nose. I could accept and have the information before Nil and Kyle get here then I would be able to keep my money and hope that they don't kill me. Or, I could say no and be able to wait for the other two Aces while I learn to dance.

"Hmm...you can tell me. I just don't want to know where he is," I ordered and he agreed amused.

"Well Lucky, the Ace of Clubs that is, is my mentor. He taught me all that I needed to know to become a Royal Club but he was always watching something that I didn't know about. I'm pretty sure that it was Zekan. Currently, he goes by the name Devlin Hubert. He's the best of the Clubs and it'll be hard to find him," he admitted and I smiled at him.

"That's the whole point," I told him and he shook his head.

"Good luck. You're going to need it," he said and he disappeared along with his dove.

Author's note: Thanks so much for the support everyone! You are amazing!!! Really! Thanks again and don't forget to vote and comment!

Chapter 17

King of Hearts Ch. 17

Jack woke up a couple of hours after the Royals had left. He shifted his position to make me lean on him and I did. He was warm like a pillow you've slept on all night and it was nice to my sore muscles. We stayed quiet as the morning light filled the room with a soft glow. I was about to doze off myself when he started to speak.

"I found out that you don't have the Royal Plague," He said calmly and I heaved a sigh of relief.

"How did you find out?" I questioned playing with his one of his hands and the other poked me lightly in the stomach.

"Listen! I had to go to another continent for you," He said pretending to be angry and I scoffed at him.

"Right and you saved the world. How do you know that I don't have the plague?" I asked and he buried his face in my hair.

"Well...I went to go ask a couple of people who were experts on it and they told me you didn't have it," He answered and I sighed again.

"Works for me," I replied and we grew quiet again. The thing was that I didn't really mind having the plague. Death wasn't really a problem for me. It seemed more like a calm sea than a stormy sky. Then again being adopted wasn't exactly easy.

"Did you know that I was adopted?" I asked as the idea popped in my mind and he shook his head, his arms wrapping tightly around me.

"How did that happen?" He asked sleepily. I guess he was still tired from yesterday.

"My mom and dad died. My grandparents on both sides were already dead from either diabetes, heart attacks, or they just got old. So I don't have anybody

left," I mused thoughtfully and his hand pulled my head back.

"Nobody, huh?" He said meeting my eyes and I smiled sheepishly.

"Well not in my blood related family," I corrected and he let my chin go.

"Was foster care bad or did you get adopted?" He questioned and I laughed quietly to myself.

"I was in foster care for two or three years...they were pretty bad. I wasn't much of a talker so I stayed away from the other kids. That went away over the years but when you're seven and you have no idea what happened to your family you end up not getting too far," I started and he started playing with my hair.

"What did happen to your family?" He questioned and I shrugged.

"I never found out. I mean I did look. With a couple of private investigators and everything but I never found out. Plus after both of the investigators got killed I thought it was better not to know," I responded and he stopped moving.

"What do you mean killed?" His voice was level but I could tell that there was vehemence in his tone and it wasn't towards me.

"Oh...well a few days after I hired them they found something and then they got killed by a car wreck and a loose gun. It was pretty creepy so I decided that I just didn't want to know," I shrugged and he picked me up and turned me around to face him.

"And you just left it?" He said and I fidgeted. It was true that I was in a huge dilemma about the entire affair but I didn't go chasing ghosts when they could kill you.

"Yeah. I didn't want someone else to die! I don't like people dying for me and you know that," I answered and he sighed.

"Promise me you won't go after them," he sighed and I shrugged. That was easy enough.

"Ok. Promise me you won't cheat on me," I replied and he stared at me.

"We're going out?" He asked stupidly and I picked up my hand to slap him. He caught my hand easily and he leaned forward to kiss my scowling lips.

"I'm kidding. I'm not going to cheat on you. I can't remember? The whole dove thing?" he reminded me and I winced. That wasn't exactly an easy thing to forget...and yet it seems so normal now.

"Yeah but you fell in love with Elizabeth," I pointed out and he rubbed his face thoughtfully.

"True. I haven't thought of her in awhile," he murmured and I sighed, so much for that affirmative. "But that was when Shelia wouldn't love me. You do love me though so it should be fine," He said touching his nose to mine and I grinned sheepishly at him for the second time that morning.

"I did get adopted," I reverted back to the former subject and he smiled at me easily.

"By who?" he questioned and I laughed.

"A completely insane woman by the name of..." I started and a hand tapped my shoulder. Looking

behind me a medium sized woman stood there with a hand on her hips and a cigarette in the other.

"Georgia!" I exclaimed staring at my foster parent. "Jack, this is the woman I was just about to tell you about. Georgia this is Jack, my boyfriend," I introduced them and Victory stood up easily and bowed low over the offered hand before kissing it.

"It's a pleasure to meet the woman who raised Mina to be such a wonderful woman," he said overly formal and she laughed.

"You probably shouldn't be thanking me for raising her. She raised herself. All I did was pay for housing and food," my foster mother replied and he let go of her hand confused.

"What do you mean by that?" He asked calmly and she smiled at him.

"This girl had to cook and make sure that there weren't any drugs in the house when I got home or else I'd become a druggie again," she answered happily and he turned his astonished eyes towards me.

"She had to adopt me as a form of therapy. So I did the one job she couldn't do. I took care of her. It was easy once I got the hang of it," I waved away her comments and she puffed on her cigarette. With the ease of doing it many times, I swiped it out of her hand and ran the lit end under the sink before throwing it in the trashcan. Then returning to the living room, I grabbed the unlit cigarette out of her hands and the carton and dumped them in the garbage.

"You told me you quit," I accused her calmly and she looked around the room for an escape.

"Oh...well, you know how things go. I'm not exactly the best type of person to be lecturing now am I?" she pointed out and I grabbed her wrist.

"If I catch you smoking again, I will make you move in with me and we both know how much you loved it last time. Got it?" I threw her wrist away from me and she nodded trembling like a little kid after being scolded for stealing for the first time. Turning back to Jack, I smiled at him.

"See?" I said to him. "Easy as pie."

"So why are you here?" he asked the trembling woman and she stopped shaking.

"Because I came here to meet the Ace's Dove," she shrugged and we both stared at her.

"Which card are you?" he asked suspiciously and I sighed. Even my foster mother was in on the system. How did I not know about it?

"I'm the Queen of Diamonds," she answered and a brief flash of Kyle ran through my mind. The thought of this hypocrite being in the same suit as Kyle was disturbing. The thought of Kyle having traits like her was downright wrong. Shivering at the mental images, I looked at Jack trying to get them out of my mind.

"That's pretty disturbing," he thought to me and I suppressed a smile. I guess he got a whiff of what I was thinking. I almost felt sorry for him. Almost.

"Ok...well beyond my day going down the toilet. Why are you really here? We both know you're here for other reasons then to see me," I interrupted my own thought process and she rolled her eyes.

"You always could read me. I'm here to tell Mr. Ace here what I know about the Ace of Clubs. Believe me when I say that I've had more contact with him than even that Jack of Clubs. Not that it matters much. That club was an idiot to begin with," she added muttering under her breath and I sighed. I loved the justice system for catching criminals but when they ordered her to get a kid...well I wasn't prone to that idea in the slightest. Turning my brain away from the recurring agitation, I smiled easily at my foster mother.

"I want you to take back those words that you just said. I enjoyed Kieran's and his dove's company," I politely demanded and shrugged.

"Your funeral. You shouldn't trust people like him so easily," She remanded and my hands balled into fists.

"Coming from an ex-druggie that's saying a lot," I spat and she scowled at me.

"I tried to quit before you came! You don't know how hard it was just to get through an hour without a fix!" she retorted.

"Really? Really! Do you know how hard it was to take care of your ass the entire time that you were getting off of them! It took me years to finally accept the fact that I wouldn't have the foster mother I wanted! Now you're telling me not to trust so easily? That's a laugh," I bit and she backed away as if slapped.

"Not to get in the way of your family reunion or anything but could you tell us what you came here to tell?" Jack stepped in and I glowered at him. However, I did keep my mouth shut as I turned to her. Seeing that I wasn't going to continue, she glanced at Jack curiously.

"Alright," she started cautiously. "I heard about the incident that you went up against with Zekan. You saw a guy in a black cloak. That's not Lucky. Lucky's the Black and White Joker. He hid himself after Giovanni Zekan showed up so that he wouldn't have to deal with us. He hates being a Royal. Says it's all a bunch of hoo-hah."

This bit of information blew me away and when I turned my eyes to Jack I could see my feelings reflected on his face.

"Do you know who the cloaked man is?" His tone of voice set off alarms in my mind and I reached for his hand. He was furious that he had been tricked.

"No idea. I haven't heard anything about him at all," she replied shaking her head and I squeezed his hand. His eyes met mine briefly but it was reassuring. He wasn't as angry as I thought he would be.

"Where's this Joker?" He questioned and Georgia shook her head.

"I can't tell you. He doesn't want me too," she denied and he had her against the wall in three seconds.

"Tell me know or you won't survive what I do next," He threatened his hand around her throat. She clawed at his hand gasping as she tried to get free. So much for that non-anger vibe.

"Victoria! Help me!" She choked looking at me and I started. How did she know that I was Victoria?

"Jack stop," I ordered and he growled at me but dropped her. Pushing him back, I pulled the Queen back up and she stood up shakily.

"How?" I asked simply and she smiled grimly.

"I used to talk to your spirit. You told me to look after you when you got reincarnated. I AM a diamond after all," she explained and I sat back on the couch. Putting my head in my hands, I rubbed my face and stared into space. It was getting to be too much, I thought to myself and Jack came over to sit by me.

"Calm down, all we have to do is find the Joker and I'm sure he'll tell us where the Ace of Clubs is," he thought to me taking my hands away from my face and holding them, helpfully.

"But...can't I just go back to teaching? That's all I want to do," I responded pitifully and he squeezed my hands, hard. "Ow!"

"Snap out of it! You're stronger than this! You went up against a man I've feared for most of my life and WON. Come on! Do this for me if not for yourself," he told me and I looked at him shocked. A slow smile spread across my face and I nodded. Standing back up, I steadied myself and turned towards Georgia.

"I want you to tell me where this Joker is and I want you to tell me now," I ordered and she grinned at me.

"I just told your boyfriend I wouldn't tell. What makes you think that I'll tell you?" she questioned fiddling with her sleeves.

"Because if you don't, I won't stop him from killing you," I answered and her head shot up stunned.

"But...but I raised you!" she protested and I shrugged. She didn't have to know that I was bluffing. I'm not cold enough to kill my foster mother in cold blood.

"Your point? You did one hell of a crappy job," I added and tears started running down her cheeks. I almost gave in then. Even when she had been detoxing, she had never cried. She had never broken down. She dealt with whatever came her way and that was the only reason why I hadn't left her to the dogs.

"Fine. He's in a cabin the Rocky Mountains. He likes to stay there because it's away from people," She relented finally and turned away from me. "I hope you're happy." With that she disappeared.

"I don't think you're going to need to go to the Rocky Mountains anytime soon," Nil's voice sounded behind me and I turned to face him. He was alone and holding a small box. It was a dark mahogany inlaid with mother of pearl. A couple of golden clasps held it together and a single silver heart was on each side.

"Why?" I asked struggling with my emotions of betraying someone. It left a bad taste in my mouth.

"We have him right here," Kyle answered coming out of the wall. He had somebody with him.

"Who?" I was getting tired of asking questions.

"Him," the boy replied pointing to the man behind him.

"Ms. Towers! How unexpected," the man greeted me and I stared at the one man who I was almost positive was not a Royal. When had my world gotten so turned upside down?

Author's note: Thank you everyone for all of your support! Publishing is a thought on my mind and if you know anything about it then please let me know! Thanks again! Don't forget to vote and comment!

Chapter 18

King of Hearts Ch. 18

"Mr. Withers?" I exclaimed astonished. I had met the man at work all the time and he was the King of Clubs? Plus he was the husband of that gossiping woman at work, Mrs. Withers. What in the world was going on?

"Yes, Ms. Towers and before you say anything I must apologize. I was the one that created the illusion that you had a 'demon' and got abandoned by your mother. She did however give you up. Although...why you know she disappeared is beyond me," the kindly man said gently and I stared at him.

"Why did you..." I started to ask and he ran a wrinkling hand over his mouth.

"I was under orders from the Ace of Clubs. He was the one who ordered me to do it. Don't ask me why. I don't know," he stopped me and I nodded. This day just kept getting weirder.

"What is he talking about?" Jack asked looking from me to him.

"I went from foster home to foster home until I was about to turn eighteen. Georgia adopted me two weeks from my eighteenth birthday. My mom gave me up because of my dreams about you. She thought it was a demon. She didn't tell my dad where she had given me away to and the investigators never found me. I found out my parents disappeared when I was in my fifth foster home," I explained and his eyes widened. I guess the similarities in our history are startling.

"I guess you want to know more about the Ace of Clubs?" Mr. Withers asked and I nodded rubbing my nose. This guy didn't live in the Rocky Mountains. Was Georgia talking about the Ace then?

"I used to live in the mountains before I met Anissa," he started, mentioning Mrs. Withers. "I met him there. He moved so you won't find him in the mountains like Georgia and I did. She was with me because she found that the more interesting ghosts followed me."

"Celestial spirits," Kyle correct automatically and Mr. Withers nodded at him.

"Sorry. Celestial spirits. They like me for some reason or other and she was always talking to them and ignoring me. I didn't mind too much until the Ace of Clubs showed up. He said his name was Hidden and he didn't like being found unless it was necessary. He told me to ruin your life and for Georgia to save it. I suppose it didn't work out very well with Georgia being a drug addict. She did try to stop before she met you but...it didn't work out very well so the Ace had to help her get you. We don't even know why but since he was an Ace we decided to help you out. Then the Joker showed up with his dove and all this weird stuff started happening. Everyone started coming like it was some big party. As you can see it didn't go

very well...that's the end of it. Georgia and I haven't seen him since," He finished and I looked at the gray haired man. He used to come to the school because he was the superintendant and wanted to check up on all of the schools. Then again I had never heard of a superintendant that went to a school twenty times out of the year to "check up" on a school. It makes more sense now...then again why didn't he ever talk to me?

"How do I know that you're not using illusion right now?" I questioned suspiciously and he smiled.

"I can see why you would ask. No, I'm not using an illusion. You would know when I do," he nodded and I examined him curiously. Deciding that he wasn't lying, I gestured to the couch and resumed my seat. I was getting hungry. Plus, I needed a shower.

"Where did you find him?" I glanced at my student and Nil grinned at me.

"At home. Mrs. Withers was really mad," he responded and that made me smile. The old lady was insane after all. It was pretty great to get back at her after she gossiped so much behind everyone's back.

Then again, it could be just me but from the amusement in Mr. Withers' eyes it seemed that he agreed with me.

"So what can you tell us about the Ace?" I questioned and he shook his head.

"Not a lot. We didn't even see the man. He always used an illusion when he met us. Although...he did always use two illusions, one was a lion and the other was an eagle. I never understood why he chose those two," he replied running his fingers along his white stubble. His green eyes looked apprehensive.

"They're both predators. Not only that but they're both symbolic in different countries. The lion's the king of the jungle and the eagle's the king of the sky. It seems that he likes control and he wants to be in control of everything that he can't be in control of. By controlling Mina, he basically controls all of us. The only question is how did he know that or rather how did he know that before anyone else?" Nil told us and sat on the couch's arm. We all stared at him for a long moment before he glanced up at us?

"What? I'm a Spade. The Ace of Spades. I'm a strategist remember? I have to know these things. That's why I read books. I don't read them for fun like you Mina," he said rolling his eyes and we kept staring at him.

"Mina?" Jack asked after a long silence and he raised an eyebrow.

"It's not like she'll become my teacher after this. I doubt she'll teach again. Plus, our ages aren't that far apart so it's just easier to call her Mina," he shrugged and I nodded accepting it. It was true. Even if I wanted to teach, I probably wouldn't teach in this town again. Not to be cliché or anything.

"Fine with me. Mr. Withers you can call me Mina too if you want," I said to the older man and he shook his head.

"My wife would kill me if I called you anything other than Ms. Towers. It not my fault that she likes to be connected to me all the time," he said calmly without a hint of aggravation. The man was a saint. He rarely got angry at people...or if he did then he was hiding it behind an illusion.

"What else can you tell us about him?" I looked at Nil and he shifted his weight.

"Well, he probably enjoys eating meat on Fridays and doing work on Sundays. He lives in the Rocky Mountains so he can enjoy the environment without the hassle of people. If he did move, he'd move to another isolated place like the Amazon or the very northern parts of Canada. He likes to be the dominating force in everything so if he was ever threatened he would remove whoever threatened him. With our kind of power that wouldn't exactly be hard. His dove is probably human so he can dominate her but I doubt that he's a wife beater. He wouldn't do that kind of pain to himself even if he is a sadist. He prefers dark clothing to have allusion to heard but not seen. His illusions were probably used to conceal a tree or plant instead of himself and he watched from a nearby place. Oh and he likes long walks on the beach and prefers blondes to brunettes," he added sarcastically and I snorted. No wonder he's a spade. So much information from a couple of sentences, I didn't even want to know how

he managed to think of all of it. I was just curious as to why he kept looking at the door.

"Are you expecting someone?" I asked slowly and his hands twitched.

"Yeah. Ever since we got Mr. Withers I've had the feeling that we're being watched," he admitted and I frowned.

"From where?" I asked and he pointed to the door. Jack met my eyes and he nodded. Standing up slowly, he inched over to the door as I started talking about irrelevant things.

"So Mr. Withers, how has your wife been lately," I interrogated watching the Royal edge towards the door.

"She's a bit aggravated that you've had a sub for over three weeks. It's a pet peeve of hers you know," he answered easily, catching on. I grinned at him.

"Really? Any other pet peeves you can tell us about?" I wondered aloud and Jack was right at the door. He glanced over at me and I nodded. Swinging the door

open, he grabbed whoever was outside and pulled him in. It turned out to be a her and not a him.

"Shelia," I greeted coldly. "What are you doing here?" She glared at me and thrust Jack away from her.

"What I can't eavesdrop without being noticed?" She growled and I rolled my eyes.

"It appears not. So why are you here?" I repeated and she shut her mouth. "What? Cat got your tongue?" The taunt didn't do anything but make her eyes glower that much harder at me. I had to admire her ability not to take a jab back. I would've unless I was protecting someone.

"Who are for here for?" I rephrased and that got a reaction. Her skin went pale and she struggled with her emotions on her face.

"No one!" She barked and I sighed. It was so hard with these types.

"Then why did you just start talking?" I questioned and she started to glare at me again.

"What makes you think that I wasn't talking before?" she hissed and I shrugged.

"I don't know...maybe your mouth not moving?" I suggested sarcastically and she stared at me.

"Why don't you trust me?" she whimpered. A complete change in character. Why? I looked over at Nil and he nodded. He caught it, even though it was a hard thing to catch but with this girl you never knew. She could just be insane.

"Because you ruined Jack's life. You're his ex-girlfriend. Not to mention that you were one of the kidnappers that kidnapped me. If I didn't have a problem with you then it would be a problem for me," I ended calmly folding my arms and Kyle walked up to me and put his face near my ear.

"The Celestial Spirits followed her and they say she's here because of Sakura. She said to spy on Nil and me. I thought she was a good guy," he reported troubled and I frowned. I thought she was too. Then again, the whole suit of Clubs seemed to be messed up somehow. Why else would Mr. Withers marry a control freak? Unless he didn't pick her...

"Mr. Withers did you pick Mrs. Withers to be your dove?" I questioned and he looked at me surprised.

"No but how is that relevant?" he responded and my frown deepened.

"Who chose her for you?" I avoided and his eyebrows lifted in the air.

"Mrs. Sakura. Why do you ask?" he repeated and I nodded. Gotcha.

"Well Sakura, it would be nice if you didn't come to us in a form I despise," I told the illusion Queen of Clubs and she grinned. Her skin melted and molded itself into her original form and Sakura grinned at me.

"Very nice, I knew you'd figure it out," she complimented and I grinned at her.

"It was only with Kyle's help. He really is adorable," I replied and picked him up, hugging him close to me.

"You don't find this disturbing?" She asked Jack and he shrugged.

"I've already told her that he was 30. She didn't listen," he retorted and she looked back at me.

"Seriously?" She asked the Ace and he nodded.

"Yup. Don't know why she doesn't just accept that this is probably his own perverse game," he sighed and Nil laughed.

"Right, like he's actually that way. I hate to say it but that kid isn't 30. He really is only 6. I checked in with his reactions and thought processes. Add that in with the fact that he's not blushing every two seconds and you've got a six year old. He just doesn't really care what you think about him. You see he likes to think that Mina's his mom," he informed us and Kyle stared at him.

"You're going to marry by the age of twenty five," he rebutted and Nil glared at him.

"I didn't need to know that," he hissed through clenched teeth and Kyle smirked.

"He doesn't like being out of control either," he confided in me and I rolled my eyes. Really? Did this have to happen right now? I didn't need two Aces

fighting over control. It's not like they're the leader of this group anyway.

"Moving on. Sakura, why are you here?" I asked and her smile faded.

"I have bad news," she whispered and I frowned.

"And that is?" I prodded gently and she covered her face with her hands.

"The Jack of Diamonds has been kidnapped," she answered in a rushed breath.

"By whom?" I asked immediately ignoring my shock. There was work to be done.

"The Ace of Clubs. He wants you to find him. That's the only explanation that he would have to kidnap him," he gasped and I shook my head.

"Not unless the Jack of Diamonds was actually the Ace of Clubs," I pointed out and she stared at me.

"Then where's the real Jack of Diamonds?" she questioned confused.

"Probably in a small town somewhere hiding among the common people," Nil said calmly and I nodded.

"But...that just doesn't make sense! Why would he pretend to be the Jack of Diamonds and then pretend to be abducted?" She exclaimed. She really cared about this kid.

"To get our attention," Nil concluded and I scowled.

"What if the Jack really did get abducted? What abilities would the Ace be able to use besides talking to celestial spirits and telling the future?" I turned to the boy in my lap and he grinned fiercely at me.

"The normal Royal abilities and he would be able to use the other Royal for bad things but if he was really powerful he might be able to drain the Royal and use his powers to make a new string of Diamond suits. Lesser diamond suits. He would make twos and threes," he briefed us.

"You can do that?" I asked shocked and he smiled grimly. He was really enjoying this.

"Yeah and when he does, it'll be our problem because he'll be dead," he replied and a silence fell about the room. My eyes met Jack's and I saw the flames of anger slowly rising in them. I was ticked too. Why kill

yourself and another person just for the ability to make other Royals?

"Do you know how we can stop him?" I asked hoping for a positive answer.

"Yeah, but you have to find him first," he pointed out and I bit my lip. Time for some fun.

Author's note: Don't forget to vote and comment! You know you want to be nice today. :D

Chapter 19

King of Hearts Ch. 19

"I know a way to find him," a low growl emitted through the room as I tried to find a way for looking for an "invisible man". Not easy when you consider the choices that I had. I could go through Nil, Jack, Kyle, or even Mr. Withers if I pushed hard enough. I didn't want the older man to suffer though so it left me in conflict. Nil and Kyle seemed too young and I was reluctant to have Jack out of my sight again. Call it a premonition or whatever but I just had a bad feeling. Not something I ignored considering that it was usually right.

"Montgomery!" I exclaimed surprised. The panther looked good and I vaguely wondered how he was

able to get here without anyone seeing him...as an escaped zoo animal anyway. Then I looked over at Sakura and I realized that I had found my answer. Well that's entertaining...I wonder how he went to the bathroom? Realizing that my thought where going towards the strange hemisphere, I decided to back track.

"How do we find him?" Nil questioned beating me to the punch. The panther almost looked a bit miffed at the sudden question but he rolled his giant eyes and shut the door with his tail. Hopping up next to Sakura, he got comfortable before continuing.

"You could track him by the doves he had earlier in his life," He suggested and I looked over at Kyle.

"It...would work," His small body seemed to agree with the proposition right away. The child almost seemed to want to start the search right away if he was able to. Grimly, I looked at the three. Sakura, Montgomery, and Kyle were high strung and ready for action. Somewhere in the back of my mind, I wondered if something was wrong.

"Then are you three going?" I probed into the tension gently and they nodded. Waving them out the door, Kyle stopped and looked back at me. His boyish charm gone and an older expression took its place.

"Don't leave her behind," he said so softly that I wouldn't have heard it if I hadn't been close to him. Jack took my hand and squeezed it. He agreed.

After they left, Mr. Withers asked if he could go home and we let him. There wasn't any point in him being there if he wasn't needed. He left his phone number on the coffee table and soon it was just Nil, Jack, and me. Jack sat on one side and Nil sat on the other while I sat in the middle of them.

"I've been wondering...how do I get my name?" Nil asked after a long moment and we both looked at Jack.

"At a naming ceremony. We'd need a Joker though," he pointed out and I nodded. I knew just the one. Picking up the phone, I called Fortson and waited for him to pick up.

"HELLO?" he yelled through the phone and I jumped holding the phone away from me as far as possible.

"Nil wants his name," I replied making sure he could hear me.

"I'LL BE RIGHT OVER!" he shouted and the phone line went dead. I glanced over at Jack and found that both of them were doubled over in laughing.

"Stop laughing," I muttered but I couldn't help the smile that spread over my face at the sight of them. It certainly was interesting how they seemed to get along so well. I wondered what had happened in that other world that they had trained in. It was something to think about.

"I'm HERE!" Fortson announced as he threw himself through the door and landed perfectly in front of me. The art teacher seemed to be happier than ever when I had called him and I had a feeling that it had something to do with the fact that I hadn't talked to him after what had happened at the Royal headquarters. Grinning, I got up and hugged him easily and turned to hug my best friend Dorothy who had been in on the act.

"I'm sorry," she whispered in my ear.

"I know," I replied and for some odd reason everything was better. I didn't have a grudge against the librarian or against the Joker, who was examining Nil in a very thoughtful manner.

"Young man, you're going to have to fight me," he explained and I started. Fight? What?

"Why?" I burst out and he shook his head.

"I've been doing this for years. We fight so we can prove that he's worthy. All he has to do is get a single hit in," he explained.

"Bam," Nil said as he punched the older man's arm and the victim looked over at him.

"I've never had a fight end this quickly," he admitted and I sighed. That was it? All he had to do was punch him? Relief flooded through me and I sat back down on the couch...which apparently wasn't a couch anymore but a human being. Looking behind me, I saw Jack gazing at me and he waggled his eyebrows. Rolling my eyes, I tried to get back up but his arms snaked around my waist and held me there.

"If you move, I'll eat you," He warned in my ear and I blushed.

"Now is not the time," I told him bluntly and he mumbled something about it never being the right time. He did let go though.

"Oh ho, so he does want to stick his," Dorothy started up again and my hand was over her mouth before she finished the sentence.

"What next?" Nil said tactfully getting all the attention off of us.

"Well, I have to do this and then I'll tell all of them your new name," he answered putting his hand on Nil's forehead and the sense of nostalgia was back. This time it was too overpowering. I don't know what I did next because I blacked out.

I woke up refreshed and strangely happy. Rolling over in my soft bed, I saw Jack sleeping next to me. His face was calm and relaxed. He didn't look younger or older, he just looked like he was sleeping. Reaching over, I touched his face gently and he shifted and muttered in his sleep. Snuggling up to

him, I let the warmth seep back into my cold arm and I was suddenly hit with reality.

"Jack, Jack! Aren't we supposed to be at Nil's naming ceremony?" I asked shaking him. Trying to wake him up and he opened his eyes lazily.

"Go back to sleep. I'm tired," He mumbled and pulled me down to his chest.

"Jack if you don't answer me then I'll never sleep with you," I threatened and he groaned. Opening his eyes again, he scowled at me and flopped back on the pillow, the giant forest green pillow. The pillows I had at home were purple.

"Jack...where are we?" I questioned and he sat up frowning at me.

"You don't remember?" he said and I shook my head.

"I remember being at the ceremony but the next thing I know, I'm waking up here," I explained and he suddenly smiled at me. "What?"

"You didn't slap me when you woke up this morning," he reminded me and I hit him with my pillow.

"This is not the time to be thinking about that! What happened?" I said exasperated and he pounced on me.

"You pushed Paint out of the way and performed the ceremony yourself," he said trailing kisses down face and I tried to push him away.

"Stop it!" I managed to choke out but it was smothered by his mouth covering mine. When he paused for air, I cover his mouth with my hand and looked at him seriously.

"You do this and I won't speak to you again," I informed him and he nibbled on my fingers thoughtfully.

"Fine," he agreed reluctantly and got off of me.

"What happened?" I repeated and he ran a hand through his maroon locks.

"After you performed the ceremony, you brought me here. Then you disappeared for a little while and came back here. You flopped into bed and fell asleep. I don't know what you did during the time you disappeared but it would be nice to know," he

answered darkly. He was insecure about whatever was happening and I touched his cheek.

"I don't know what happened but I can tell you that it wasn't anything you wouldn't like," I told him honestly and he leaned into my hand.

"I know," he whispered and I blinked. We were back in my house.

"How did you..." I started and he shook his head.

"I can't go in and out of dimensions like that. I have to stand up. That was all you," he replied and I stared at him.

"Are you saying that I'm a Royal?" I gasped looking down at my hands. There weren't any purple splotches on them but my back was itching. Turning from him, I pulled off my shirt and heard Jack's sharp intake of breath.

"What do you see?" I asked quietly and I felt his hand go to the middle of my back.

"Do you really want to know?" he replied.

"Yeah," I nodded and he breathed out slowly.

"It's a card. A card with every suit of it in the middle encircled inside an oval. Outside of the oval are the same suits but in different spots..." his voice trailed off and ever so gently he kissed the upper right of the middle of my back. "A heart, a spade, a club, and a diamond." He touched them as he said it and I felt my skin burn. Confusion met the flames and I wondered for the first time in my life, who I truly was. His arms wrapped themselves around my midsection and he pulled me towards him.

"Mina, my dove," he said softly into my shoulder blade and I sighed. Maybe I should just relax into this. It felt better than stopping.

I wasn't the one who pulled away. Jack released me and spun me around to face him. He pulled me gently off the bed and put my shirt back on. A tender smile stretched across his face as he looked at me and I wondered why he was so happy.

"Do you love me?" he asked calmly and I frowned examining his features.

"Yes," I said simply and he nodded. He took my hand and led me to the living room. Everyone was there.

Nil, Kyle, Sakura, Montgomery, Georgia, Kieran, Erin, Fortson and Dorothy were all there.

"What are you doing here?" I asked all of them and they gazed at me for only a second. One by one they kneeled before me and I stared at all of them in confusion.

"Jack...what are they doing?" I trembled. The nostalgia was back and it was in full force.

"You're the Card Box. The holder of all the cards. The Ruler of the Royals. If you call, we come. You are the Queen of Cards," he answered calmly and I turned to look at him. Slowly, He slid down to one knee and he put a gossamer kiss on my hand.

"The Queen of Cards and my Dove," he added simply and warmth spread throughout my body as I looked at all of them. The nostalgia faded away and was replaced by simple truth. Looking down at my free hand, I saw the circle of suits on it and I examined it. Queen of Cards? Is that who I am? Not a reincarnation of Victoria or even plain old Mina Towers but a Queen? I didn't know what to say. I didn't know how I was supposed to act. Gazing at my

new found people, I mentally slapped myself. No time for doubts. I needed to get to the bottom of all of this mess.

"Please stand. Kyle, Sakura, Montgomery, what did you find?" I pointedly asked them as everyone stood.

"We found some celestial spirits that were his old doves," Sakura informed me and I nodded. Something shimmered just outside of my vision and I turned my head to the side. Staring at the spot where it had been, I concentrated and a blistering pain rang out in my brain. Exhaling slowly, I ignored it and kept concentrating. At first only the shimmer came back and then actual forms took shape. By the time that the pain intensified to an unmanageable point, I was able to see the three women that Sakura had just told me about. Letting my concentration fade away, I felt the pain ebb and die. With it, the figures disappeared.

"Well...that was interesting," I quipped and smiled at the group in front of me.

"You saw them?" Georgia rasped surprised and I nodded. I didn't have time to be angry at her for appearing in my life again.

"What can you tell me about them?" I directed at Kyle and the small boy ran towards me and I picked him up.

"They all like lollipops. Orange flavored lollipops," he answered dead serious and I suppressed a grin. I guess some things just don't change even if you are a Queen...which is more of a relief than he would ever know.

"So they prefer fruits? If they do then it may mean that they were all health nuts and enjoyed exercising in the morning. Or they could be punch lovers and enjoy spiking it in the morning. Or they could be..." Nil's voice trailed off as we all looked at him. "What? She named me Thought for a reason."

"Thought, huh? It suits you," I nodded proud of my own ability to name correctly and the teenager rolled his eyes.

"The first one was correct," Georgia supplied and I frowned. Nil really did think fast. Then again...he was a spade.

"Anything else we can get before we ask them what they know?" I questioned the Diamonds and Kyle grinned up at me.

"They all had miscarriages, they were born on the same day, they have the same body structure, and the same activities," he responded and I looked down at the angelic boy.

"How do you know that?" I asked and his smile didn't waver.

"They told me. I asked and they answered. They were very happy to help after what happened to them," he replied.

"What happened to them?" I asked and he looked uncomfortable. Looking over at Georgia, Nil, and Jack, he glanced back at me and shivered.

"It's something bad," he confided in me in a whisper and I nodded.

"How bad," I went along calmly but a sense of dread was creeping up my spine.

"Really bad," He said lowering his voice even more.

"Can you tell me what it was?" I said softer, copying him.

"I don't know. Let me ask them," he frowned and turned his face a little to the left. I didn't hear what he asked them but when he turned back to me he nodded.

"They said that the Ace raped and butchered them," he told me in a hushed whisper.

Author's note: Thanks for the support and don't forget to vote! :D

Chapter 20

King of Hearts Ch. 20

"How is that possible?" I demanded of the younger boy and he frowned at me perplexed.

"Aces aren't like the other Royals. They're able to disregard some of the rules. Like hurting the doves," Montgomery chimed in gruffly and I scowled at him.

"But slicing up a dove? Is that even possible? I thought that you weren't able to go against your dove," I protested and the three Aces looked at each other.

"You can if you have two doves," Jack rebutted unhappily and I stared at him.

"Two doves?" I asked aghast and he nodded. Polygamy in the Royal system? Not something I wanted to think about at the moment.

"Yeah. Basically, you ask if the two people will still love you if you love both of them and if they say yes then you have two doves. It's sadly simple," Sakura shrugged and I stared at them. After trying and failing to get my mind around this new development, I ended up hugging Kyle close and sighing.

"I think you broke her," the small boy stated and I couldn't help but smile at him. Pulling away, I showed him my face and he nodded to himself.

"You definitely broke her," he agreed and I burst out laughing. Startled, he jumped out of my arms and ran to hide behind Nil.

"She's gone crazy," He mumbled holding onto his teddy bear tightly.

"No. She's just laughing at you," The older boy replied and the Ace glared at him.

"I don't believe you!" he huffed and sat heavily on the couch. Regaining my self control, I sobered at the

thought of what the entire event could mean and I stared at people waiting for orders. It was either that or they were watching me. Not that it actually mattered.

"Kyle and Georgia, I need both of you to go and make sure to question the spirits thoroughly. I don't need any information passing their lips that I don't know," I ordered and the two Diamonds nodded and both of them disappeared into the floor.

"Sakura and Montgomery, I need you two to get the names of the spirits and see what you can turn up. Fortson and Dorothy, could you go manage the headquarters for now? I don't think I'll need it. Kieran and Erin...you two should start teaching me some more moves while we wait and you two," I said turning on Nil and Jack. "Go play a game of chess while we wait." By the time I had finished my debriefing the room was completely clear excepting the last four and me.

"Do I really have to play a game of chess against the Ace of Spades?" Jack whined and Nil started setting up the chess board that had appeared.

"Are you really that scared to play a Spade, Ace?" Kieran asked softly and he glowered at the Club.

"Maybe," he muttered and sat down across from Nil.

"Ready?" Nil asked looking up at him and the man grumbled under his breath.

"Go easy on me," he muttered and moved his white pawn forward.

"How about you? Ready to learn?" Erin question and I turned to face her.

"Yeah," I nodded and Kieran started playing on the piano.

We passed the time peacefully. Aside from the occasional mumbling from Jack, the peace wasn't interrupted by anything. It came to an end when Kyle popped back in the room through a wall and watched me as I followed Erin's steps. I noticed him when he sat on the couch and I continued talking while I asked him what he found out.

"The Ace likes the same kind of girl," Georgia answered for him and I glanced up at her sharply.

Making sure my feet moved the right way, I concentrated on her report.

"They were all brown haired and brown eyed. Like sports and there were...other similarities that were strange. In any case, they all have the same story. Which is," she informed me and Nil snorted in the corner.

"Strange? Unbelievable? Odd? They all fit. That's the trick. If they all have the exact same story, then it's a prank. Obviously, the trick's on us. These girls were an..." he started.

"Illusion," Sakura finished, walking in. She looked ticked. She was also holding three manila folders that looked like trouble.

"Should I ask?" I asked still moving in time with Erin and the woman shook her head.

"You wouldn't get anywhere. The three women are fakes. Real names taken from some dead people a long time ago, they weren't even murdered," she replied in disgust and I nodded.

"So why don't we send one back?" said Nil and we all looked over him. "Checkmate."

"What! No! I was so close!" Jack exclaimed staring at the board and slammed his hands down. "I hate chess!"

"Jack, control yourself," I told him exasperated. "Nil, what are you talking about?"

"He sent us fake people so we should send a couple back," He answered calmly and the chess board disappeared as he stood up.

It suddenly struck me how mature he had gotten over the past few days. His maturity before had been from novels but now it was from experience...I couldn't help but wonder if that was a good thing.

"It's a good idea. What would have to be done?" I compliment and he looked pointedly at Sakura.

"You'd have to make a huge illusion and it would drain you for a little while. I wouldn't be able to manage it and neither would the King or the Jack. I mean you're talking about something that would take even the Ace a few days to make. You'd be able to

make it but you aren't at that level of power yet," she pointed out.

"How would I get there?" I asked and Jack stood up.

"You'd have to train for a couple of years," he informed me and I shook my head.

"I need to do this quickly. If he gets out of control then I'll end up pulling him back. So how do I get there?" I persisted and Nil shook his head.

"You could take all of us on. Well...the higher levels. We'd need Mr. Withers or you, Sakura. We would need to have all four suits there for it to work. Are you up to it?" He turned to the oriental woman and she searched his face for something.

"Yes," said she after a moment and he nodded.

"We'll need a Joker. It would be better if we had both but we only have one. You need to call Fortson," Montgomery spoke up and my eyebrows drew together.

"How do I do that?" I demanded.

"Think about who his is and then say his name. You should be able to mentally connect with him. With all of us," he corrected himself and I took a deep breath. Focusing on my favorite art teacher wasn't hard. Thinking about who he was, was a different matter. He seemed to fade in and out of my conscious until I got so frustrated that clenched my hands and demanded that the image stand still in my mind. For some unknown reason that seemed to work and it slowly got less fuzzy. There stood Frank Fortson in the flesh looking startled and mildly amused, paint stained shirt and all.

"I need both of the Jokers to come here," I explained and he frowned but nodded. Dorothy suddenly appeared and she touched him lightly on the arm.

"Do you need to go?" She asked and he turned to her.

"How are you in here?" He inquired and it all clicked.

"She's the Black and White Joker," I answered for her and they turned to me.

"How did you know?" She questioned and I smiled ruefully at her.

"You're the only higher card that I haven't actually met. I'm wondering why Zekan let you stay by Fortson if he already knew." I replied and she flushed, looking sheepish.

"He never knew. I was able to suppress what I was the entire time. Although...I knew what you were the whole time. You just didn't know. Which wasn't too bad because we're friends now," she smiled winningly at me.

"I need both of you here," I reminded them and let the image slip away.

"How did it go?" Jack asked and I found myself sitting on the couch facing my bookshelves.

"Dorothy's the other Joker," I shrugged and he gapped at me.

"And you learned that while you were talking to them or...?" he struggled to get himself together and I tapped him lightly on the arm.

"Yep. It was really easy too...after I got the image to stand still," I informed him and he started gapping

again. "You know, a fly will get in there if you don't close it."

"We can only get thoughts...but a picture..." he closed his mouth in wonder and I frowned. I don't think I like being a Queen. Being more powerful isn't everything.

"I thought Dorothy was a Queen," Sakura muttered to herself and Jack shook his head.

"We have all the queens here except for...where's Shelia?" He asked alarmed and I frowned at him. Right now was not the time to get jealous over him missing is first dove but still...

"Why do you want to know?" I accused and he glanced at me worried.

"She's the Queen of Spades," He answered and I stared at my hands sheepish. So much for jealously. It would be a problem if she wasn't controlled.

"Where is she?" I questioned the group examining each of them in turn.

"The spirits say that she's looking for the fourth Ace like we are," Georgia offered and I scowled at the response.

"Why?" I barked and she winced.

"Shelia...wants to become his dove," she whispered twiddling her thumbs.

"Why would she...ah...," I started and realized the conclusion everyone else had already made. She was going to become his dove to control him. If she controlled the last Ace, than everything would go down in a doomed spiral of either death and destruction or just destruction...which is why we should stop her. We were going to need backup. That meant looking for the other Jacks and Kings before she got them. Busy days ahead.

"Are we going to look for them?" Jack asked quietly reading my mind and I searched the group thoughtfully.

"Yeah. We are. We're going to look for the rest of the Royals. Who's up for it?" I questioned and they all raised their hands without hesitation. Kyle grinned at

me wolfishly and I suppressed a shiver. Sometimes that boy just didn't look human, even if he was adorable.

"Kyle, go get Mr. Withers and search for the King of Hearts. Make sure that you're able to mask your thoughts. Got it?" I briefed the six year old going on thirty one and he nodded. Within seconds he had gone through the floor and on his mission. Turning to the rest of the group, I grimly looked them over.

"Montgomery, what are you the King of?" asked I almost impatiently.

"Diamonds," he growled and I blinked. The Diamonds had a rough crowd.

"Tell me about it," Jack muttered listening in and I ignored him.

"Go with Sakura and look for the King of Spades. Stay ahead of the game. If you need help contact Nil. Got it?" I directed at the pair and they agreed.

"Nil, you're going to search for the Jack of Spades," I nodded at him and Montgomery started hacking. I

raised an eyebrow at the interruption but the panther grinned at me.

"Jane. The Jack of Spades is a woman," he corrected and I stared at him stunned.

"How did that happen?" I mumbled trying to find a rational reason and failing.

"The original Queen thought that the Jack would get lonely," Jack told me and I looked at him like he was crazy.

"You're kidding, right?" I said shocked. What kind of reason is that?

" No...the first Queen was a bit...strange," He shrugged.

"Strange? The Queen was a hopeless romantic," Fortson laughed and I rubbed my nose. I didn't even want to think about that one.

"Right. Well, Nil you're going to look for the Jane of Spades," I shook my head and he nodded amused.

"Kieran and Erin, You're looking for the Jack of Hearts. Remember to..." I began.

"Shield our minds. We get it," Kieran said smoothly and they left.

" Jack...I want you to go look for the Jane of Diamonds," I told him slowly and his eyes narrowed.

"Why? Aren't you coming with me?" he stepped closer to me, dangerously.

"No, you're looking for the Jane. By yourself," I replied and he glared at me for a long moment.

"Why can't you send the Jokers?" He questioned not letting go and I shook my head.

"They're going to help me get to the potential of my power. I'm going to need that if I'm going against the Ace. You know that," I pointed out and he was about to say something but he disappeared before he could. That seemed to que everyone's departure and the room was empty, besides the Jokers and me, in a matter of seconds.

"Don't worry. Our lover's tiffs were always bad too," Dorothy comforted putting an arm around my shoulders and I glanced up at her. The tattoo had been hiding on her the back of her neck and it was

crawling forward. It was a very Dorothy like tattoo. A cobweb with the word "Joker" inside the pattern settled on the right side of her neck passing a bit onto the flesh of her cheek.

"Was yours able to threaten the peace of an entire race?" I questioned almost hopefully and the couple glanced at each other.

"No...but that's ok! You have us after all," she smiled and I sighed. It wasn't much of a relief but it was something.

"If you say so," I mumbled and she half hugged me.

"Cheer up! We'll get you ready to kick ass in no time!" The Goth grinned.

"I'm not worried about beating people up but if you insist," I joked and Fortson winked at me.

"Believe me! We insist!" He burst out happily and I smiled shaking my head. The Jokers each took one of my hands and transported us into another dimension.

Author's note: Sorry for not getting this up in time! My internet has been going all over the place. Don't forget to vote and comment!

Chapter 21

King of Hearts Ch. 21

The dimension we landed in turned out to be something out of a science fiction novel. A craft of some sort was sitting on a cold, deserted planet without any notice of how the craft came to be there. I wasn't worried about the cold climate or even the fact that if we stayed too long here we might die. No, what I was worried about was the fact that Dorothy and Fortson were shooting little balls of something at me, and it stung like a mother! I was going to kill them if one of them didn't end up killing me first. Cursing to the high heavens, I ran for my skin and found myself behind a giant boulder.

"Come out, Mina! We're trying to get you to develop your skills! You know we could spend years here and go back and it would only be a day later then when we left? We call this space the..." Frank shouted happily.

"Entertainment space! I know!" I yelled back irritably and Dorothy appeared in front of me.

"You just read his mind," she congratulated me and showed me a huge ball of the mysterious substance. "What is this called?"

"Judging Crystals," I answered confused and hoping that she wouldn't hit me with it.

"Exactly. Did you know that before?" She questioned and something was off with the way she said it.

"No..." I replied and she smiled showing her teeth. That was it! She wasn't moving her mouth! Which means I was...mind reading?

"Crap!" I dodged out of the way of the incoming J.C. and started running again. The Jokers seemed to be having a great time torturing me and I was getting agitated. I shouldn't be running around in another

dimension! I should be at school teaching students and wondering what I was going to eat for lunch! These two though...they cause all of this to happen. If they hadn't been employed at that school...

"Then you would have met Jack anyway," I reprimanded myself and ran harder. I may not have wanted this job but I got it so I had to stick with it. Even if that meant getting a little hurt in the process.

With my new goal in mind, I stopped and turned to face my attackers. If the two Royals had been even a little concerned by the sudden change in demeanor, they didn't show it. Instead, they kept hitting me those damned crystals that hurt like hell. Putting aside the stinging pain, I closed my eyes and concentrated. I had been able to do that and see a ghost so why not try that to make myself disappear? It seemed to have worked because when I opened my eyes again, I wasn't getting hit by those idiotic crystals and I was really happy about that. The Jokers had disappeared so whether or not they were copying me was a problem. How was I supposed to defeat them if I couldn't see them...or rather how

were they supposed to teach me? Confused and mildly alarmed, I found myself staring at a giant boulder. This giant boulder wasn't a normal one you'd find in my dimension. No. Instead it turns out to be a giant boulder dog. Yes. A dog.

I found this out when I was staring at the rock and it started to move. A piece of it did in any case. I soon formed the conclusion it was a canine when it stood up and had the shape of man's best friend. Not that this doggy would have loved men very much. In fact when Fortson suddenly came into view the pooch seemed to have a fit.

""Woah! Hold it Fido! I'm not the enemy here!" He boomed at the huge animal and it actually stopped moving. "I need you to find out where the woman with this scent is. Can you do that for me?" The dog nodded and had to lie down to sniff the object he had in his hands. Almost immediately, it got up and bounded my way. Hastily getting up, I started running away. I seemed to be doing that a lot here. It was a great chase. The dog seemed to be having the time of its life and I was trying not to fall behind and

get eaten. That's when it occurred to me. What if I just made myself larger than the dog was? The only problem was that I didn't have any way to distract him to be able to concentrate hard enough. Fixating on the image and smell of another me wasn't easy but I was able to manage it. Seeing another me sprint off in into the distance was weird and very awkward to take my mind off of. Pondering how I was to get bigger than the mutt, I didn't observe my surroundings until I looked down at the annoying itch in my foot. I was gigantic. The spaceship looked just about my size and I speculated on the where it would be programmed to go...if it was programmed at all. Making myself visible, I searched for the dog. I found him looking up at my face attentively. He didn't seem to see me as an enemy but more as a human...from what I gathered from his chaotic thoughts. I would never suggest reading the minds of a dog, ever. It's not that interesting. Plus, it appears to give you a headache.

"Go find the little people," I instructed and the dog shot off glad to be able to do something to move. It seems that he had been here awhile. Which was

perfectly fine with me...but he was starting to grow on me.

Shrinking back down to my normal size, I waited for the Boulder Dog to come back with his prizes...or twigs...hopefully he wouldn't crush them....ok so maybe it was a bad idea but I can fix it! Running in the direction that the dog went, I searched for his brain waves and found them closer to the spaceship then I had expected. I bolted for the group and spotted them dodging the dog.

"CALL HIM OFF!" Dorothy screamed at me and just missed being crushed by his giant paws.

"Hey! Um...FIDO! Come here boy!" I exclaimed and put the thought in his mind that he was my pet and he automatically accepted it. Do dogs even have brains? Anyway, Fido sat down at my feet and stared down at me expectantly.

"Good boy!" I told him and reached up to pet him...even if I couldn't reach him. He seemed to get what I was trying to do though and put his muzzle in my hands. Yeah he had grown on me. Even if I did like cats better.

"So...are we done yet?" I questioned and they started laughing. I wasn't quite sure what was so funny but it did seem to have some kind of appeal to it. Looking up at the dog, I wondered what would happen to him and I tapped him lightly on the nose.

"You want to come with me, huh?" I said absently to him and tapped his nose again wishing that he would get smaller. Smaller he got. He ended up getting so small that I was looking at a keychain size doggy. Not something I wanted so, I tried again, this time making him bigger. It seemed to work because he stopped at just the right size and I happily picked him up in my arms.

"Say hi to my new pet," I told the two educators and they grinned.

"Only you would make a pet out of a rock," Dorothy giggled and Fortson shook his head.

"A pet rock...what will Victory say?" he muttered and I glared at him.

"It's either the dog and me or neither of us," I snorted and returned to my home dimension with my new pet.

My house was quiet when I flopped on the couch and put Fido next to me. What a cliché name. Fido. Who even name's their pet that anymore? It's like naming a cat fluffy. You just don't do it. Considering his name, I looked over at my rock like pet and noticed that he was sleeping peacefully. Did he even eat? What did he eat? How was I supposed to take care of something that I didn't even know if it ate or not? Was he even a he? The questions just kept piling up until I laid my head in my hands and sighed. I was putting another being at risk by taking him from home dimension and this is where I end up. Jeez. You would think that I was some sort of magnet for unwanted people or at least weird things. The Royal thing is weird. The Jack and Victoria thing is strange. The me not teaching because I was the Queen of the Cards thing was just plain wrong. Yet here I am. Staring thoughtlessly into space not worrying about anything in particular and I couldn't help but smile. This truly was bliss in many different ways. I didn't

have a whole lot to worry about besides getting back to school and saving the Royal race from destruction but hey! That's just the beginning of it. Great isn't it?

I was rambling in my mind and I wasn't quite sure how I was going to handle all of this. Which was fine. I didn't expect me not to handle it and even if I didn't it wasn't as if I was going to become insane. I did have priorities. Such as checking up on Jack. Since it sounded like such a good idea, I decided to go through with it. Searching with my mind for his vibes, I found myself lost in a sea of thoughts that was more entertaining. What I wouldn't give to just sit there and listen to people thoughts. I could learn whole life stories from just poking around! That would be fun. In a really unmoral way but who was keeping track? Suddenly, a mental jab poked its way through the blur of mental thoughts and I found myself connected to Jack.

"You were looking for me?" he said calmly and I mentally flushed. Don't ask how. I just did. I wasn't even quite sure I could have the feeling of flushing in my mental state.

"Well?" he said impatiently.

"Oh, I was just checking up on you," I replied and I heard him curse quietly to himself.

"Right. Well I have to go. The whole getting the Jane of Diamonds isn't going quite as well as I planned. See you later," he ended cutting of the connection and I was left in the sea of thoughts, barely able to flounder for my own sanity.

"What's up with him?" I mumbled under my breath and went back to my own occupied mind. It seemed to be taking forever for everyone to track the other Royals down so all I could do was wait for them to come back...and go teach at school. Glad to have something to do, I got up and stared getting ready to teach. I needed the mental stress of something and hopefully, I would get it through this outlet.

Just as I finished getting ready, I found myself face to face with Nil who was holding on to the arm of a girl.

"Welcome back," I greeted Nil and he nodded smiling.

"This is Fiend. The Jane of Spades," he introduced us and I looked at the over radical girl who stood next to

him. When I mean radical, I mean that there was a really weird jacket covering a gown that would have looked great on anyone but her. Add that to the boots that would have gone with the dress and you get a very awkward looking girl. And by awkward, I mean this girl looked awkward. Half of her hair was short while the other half was long, blonde and dark drown respectively. With highlights and all. Her face was adorably horrible if there was such a thing and her body seemed to match. All long short limbs. Which was oddly amazing. Fiend was the right name for this girl oddly enough and she seemed to know it because she looked as comfortable as a girl like her could be.

"Hey," she voiced stopping my examination of her. She stared at me challengingly and I smiled back at her.

"Hey. Do you want to help us?" I questioned and she nodded mildly amused...or was it horrified? I couldn't tell. Her face wasn't exactly making it easy. The only window to this girl was her voice and maybe her eyes if she stopped glaring at me.

"I heard Nil out and I challenged him to a game. He won and here I am," She shrugged and I smiled. That was like Nil. He usually won games even if it was by pure luck.

"What game?" I asked curious looking from one to the other and Nil's smile widened.

"Chess," He replied just a bit smug and I laughed.

"Fiend, you got the short end of the stick on that one," I informed her and she frowned at me...or did she smile? It was so hard to tell!

"Why do you say that?" She asked her mouth doing the wave. I couldn't tell whether she was angry or happy.

"He plays in Chess tournaments all the time. He wins every single one of them," I briefed her and her eyes widened and then narrowed.

"You cheated then," she accused him and he shook his head.

"I played the game. You asked me what game I wanted to play and here I am. You let me choose the

game. That was your fault, not mine," he pointed out rationally and she glared or smirked at him.

"Hey, no need to get testy," She muttered and smiled at him. I mean it was an actual smile. There wasn't any mistake about it and it seemed to bring her entire structure together. Suddenly, the outfit looked great and even the hairstyle looked like it fit perfectly with her. The sudden change in her left me speechless.

"Well, Ms. Queen. I have a problem," she stated bringing me out of my thought and I looked at her confused.

"What's that?" I asked pulling myself together.

"I don't have a home," She answered and I blinked. I really was a magnet.

"Well, to have a home you need to have name. Do you have one?" I inquired and she frowned...or scowled.

"No. My mom was too freaked out by me at birth," she responded slowly looking for my reaction and I nodded.

"I know the feeling. I was brought to a priest for exercising a demon out of me because I was dreaming of the Ace of Hearts," I nodded understanding.

"That's your dove right?" She said and I nodded.

"Yeah."

"Where is he?"

"He's going to get the Jane of Diamonds for our little group."

"So you don't know if he's getting her in unusual ways?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"I'm saying he might be cheating on you."

"He would never do that," I said aghast and she shook her head.

"You never know. You can't exactly feel it. For all you know he could be with that Queen of Spades," She pointed out and I stared at her.

"I know because I trust him," I replied determinedly and she shook her head.

"You're out of your mind to trust men. They're all skirt chasers," she voiced and I shuddered. That was a thought I didn't want to think about.

"Can I stay here?" She asked calmly and I nodded.

"Yeah," I agreed with a sigh and found myself with yet another strange person.

Author's note: Sorry for it being so late! my internet's gone to the dogs! Don't forget to vote and comment! Thanks for the support! :D

Chapter 22

King of Hearts Ch. 22

Fiend was entertaining. Especially with the stories she told. After you got over not being able to read her expressions, besides happiness, she's easy to talk to. Although, it did seem to have some repercussions with other people, her appearance that is. Georgia was a major pain in the butt about it. Not that it mattered much. I ignored her anyway. It was only until Nil made clear just how many people would be at my home that I listened to her.

"You'll have a ton of people here. Families. Not just people. We got lucky with Fiend because she's an orphan but who knows about anyone else," he pointed out and I looked over at him from my Card

Chart. He had suggested it the day he came back and I had agreed. It seemed like a good idea. It got me more informed and Nil didn't have to worry about explaining everything. With more than seventeen people staying here, it would be crowded.

"Why are they all coming again?" I questioned removing Jack's name from the chart and sticking it back on straighter. It was way too entertaining for it to be in my way while I was trying to figure out what to do but I didn't want to change rooms.

"If Shelia or the Ace of Clubs gets anywhere near them it would be a problem because they could use them against us," He answered patiently.

"And why are we worried about them?" I asked turning to him from the sticky Card Chart.

"Because they are a threat to our way of life and they could create an entire set of cards that we would have to deal with. Not only that but if the Ace of Clubs is who I think it is then we're going to be in a bind. He's been messing with our lives since the very beginning," he replied and I saw his hands curl into fists. He really didn't like the Ace of Clubs very

much...not that I couldn't blame him but still. It was a bit harsh of him.

"What are we supposed to do about the housing?" I changed the subject back to the former and Georgia glided in the room. I didn't want to look stupid in front of my former parent but being the queen didn't mean that I had the skills sets of all of them. I just had more power and a small amount of knowledge of each suit skill. It would take years for me to become as powerful in a skill like Nil's. He was trained from a young age. Thinking about it a bit more, I realized that I didn't know if I would get stronger or not and if I didn't then I just had a massive amount of energy to spend on creating...things and transporting and telekinesis and reading people's minds and some other things...

"Mina? Did you hear what I said?" he waved his hand in front of my face and I smiled sheepishly at my former student.

"I was getting there," I admitted and he rolled his eyes.

"You need to find a place that's big enough to house all the cards and their family. The only question is where," he stated and I nodded.

"You could use my hotel as a base," Georgia offered and I slowly turned to her.

"Your hotel? Since when did you own a hotel?" I raised an eyebrow and she blushed.

"It's on the outskirts of a southern town so it wouldn't be too hard to get to and only a few people would bother us," She persisted and I glanced over at Nil.

"It's not a bad idea. Plus, we need security and you can do that by pulling your energy together and neutralizing the building," He agreed and I bit back a sigh. She won this round.

"Where is it?" I demanded and she started to describe it again and I slipped into her mind to get the image. Grabbing his and her hands in each of my own, I concentrated on the image and moved us to the designated site.

The first element I noticed was that everything was brown and I mean everything. A wind blew up and threw dust in our faces, making all of us cough.

"No wonder you never came here. It's so...," I searched for the appropriate word.

"Dirty? Scummy? Uninhabitable?" he tried to fill in and I shook my head sadly.

"Disgusting," I spat out and she cringed.

"Sorry...my old dove gave it to me. He wanted to be a huge success in the hotel industry," she mumbled and a wave of shame washed over me. What was I doing making my foster mom miserable? Even if she cost me my college years and a ton of money it doesn't mean I should hate her. I should be an adult about it all.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean that," I apologized and she nodded slowly. Turning back to the hotel, I examined the property with Nil.

I did mean it. It was disgusting. A deep layer of grim had settled over the building and it seemed to want to float over to me. Suppressing a shiver, I closed my

eyes against the horrifying site and gathered my energy. It didn't take very long and I blasted the old building with it. First, I had to change the building, decorate the inside, and then do the outside. Second, I had to send a message to everyone where we were. Thirdly, I had to look at my work. I reached the third step quickly and I opened my eyes to a sight that would have made me cry...if I hadn't been with Georgia and Nil.

My creation was beautiful. It was a huge ball sitting on a platform that was four stories high. The other six floors were actually in the ball and were for the Royals. Each floor was for a different section for the different power ranges of the suits and station. Jacks' had the fifth floor; Queens' had the sixth floor and so on. The suits were lined up with each other on in the ball so it looked like a huge beach ball. Each suit had different colors. Hearts had red and black. Diamonds had red and white. Clubs took black and blue while Spades took black and gold. The only rooms that were different were the Jokers who had their own color scheme already. It made a stripe across the perfection of the ball and I wondered vaguely why I

had kept it that way. My thoughts moved however to the surrounding area which looked much better after it had been changed. Where there once was...dirt. There was now a large garden that you could walk thorough. It even included a greenhouse! I had at some point during the transition thought about Fido and ended up moving him. He now sat happily chasing a random butterfly through the grass. I felt extreme pity for that butterfly.

"What made you think of it?" Nil asked interrupting my thoughts.

"A globe," I answered and he laughed.

"Still a teacher at heart," he said to himself and I led the way inside. I made my way to my suite and gazed outside for a moment. I had moved everything that was at my home here and it felt like my apartment. Sitting down on my couch, I laid back and stared at the ceiling. I had made it out of glass so that I could stare at the sky when I wanted to. It was nice to relax for a moment but now I needed to get to work. Pushing myself off the furniture, I rummaged through my drawers and found the uniform I made.

A vest, pants, and a red button down shirt was it with a simple black tie. Easy and simple.

After adorning the said attire, I went down to the lobby and sat behind the receptionist desk. I had programmed all of the keycards to transmit to a computer down here and you had to get it first before you could do anything else. I would now be able to see where everyone went. When I sat down I noticed that Georgia's and Nil's keys were missing. Everyone slowly trickled in from the apartment and various locations. Soon only the people searching for the missing Royals were gone and I was able to concentrate on what I was doing. Nil ended up moving me out of the way because he wanted to be in charge of security and I let him. Why should I stop a guy from doing his job?

"Where's the library?" Dorothy asked stopping at the desk and I pointed to my left. She came back a few minutes later with one of my favorite novels and I smiled my thanks at her. It was a good one with a guy named Tom and a dragon going on a journey somewhere. I never grew out of that stage. It was a

companionable silence that fell when I started reading my book and Nil was watching the screen. Hours passed like that and I finished my book with a soft sigh.

"Was it really that bad?" Kyle asked me staring at me on his tippy toes over the countertop.

"Actually it was pretty good. When did you get here?" I questioned surprised to see him and he grinned at me.

"About an hour. Jackson Major wanted to talk to you right away but Mr. Withers told him to wait in a really scary voice," He replied and I looked over at Nil. He seemed to be holding back laughter at the scene that I was unfortunate to not see. It would have been really entertaining. Trying to get the imagery out of my mind, I stood up and went over to the sitting area that I created for just the purpose of waiting.

"Ms. Towers, how are you?" Mr. Withers asked getting up and I smiled at him.

"I'm great. So this is the King of Hearts?" I replied looking over at the man next to him. I could tell that I wasn't going to like him. His hair was slicked back and a sleazy suit framed the air that he gave off. The air of a con man. His beady green eyes seemed to undress me on the spot and I had the distinct feeling of wanting to punch him.

"Mr. Major, I suggest you keep your eyes where they belong," Mr. Withers said coldly and I looked at him gratefully.

"I'm sorry, I'm just so please to meet you," He wheezed and bowed to me. I felt his grubby little fingers start to rifle through my mind and I made quick work of him. Pulling on them, I made his mental fingers roll into the back of my subconscious on that one thought. If he didn't let go soon then he would be lost to the world. No man like him would ever want that. After a second of pain on his part, he removed his mental fingers and winced visibly in pain.

"Keep your fingers where they belong," I said icily and he grinned sheepishly at me.

"I guess I shouldn't underestimate the queen," he muttered rubbing his hands together unhappily.

"That might be a good idea," I replied and he scowled at me.

"Is he putting you on?" A brisk voice asked and a hand grabbed the small man by the collar. An enormous woman was holding him up and scolding him. Laughter bubbled up in my throat and I bit my tongue to keep it from getting out.

"Ms. Towers," He gasped. "These are my wives." With that statement he motioned towards the area behind the woman and the other women came into view. His lot alone would take up ten rooms. Four wives and who knows how many children were standing there looking impatient.

"We've been waiting an hour," she bellowed at me and I frowned at her.

"We'll have to fix that won't we?" I breezed through and went over to the desk. Nil handed me the room keys without his gaze leaving the screen. Walking back over, I took them to her and she grabbed them

out of my hands. The circus left with children trailing behind them and I watched them go, with all their baggage, up the stairs instead of in the elevators.

"You don't see that much anymore," I said to Nil leaning on the counter and he glanced over at the ending of the train.

"Polygamy or a ton of kids?" He questioned looking back at the screen and I winced.

"Both," I agreed with the unspoken connection and stared at stairs for a long moment before I thought of something.

"I thought I neutralized this place," I told him confused.

"You did," he confirmed calmly.

"Then why was Major able to get in my head?" I asked befuddled.

"You neutralized the building to keep us from using all the powers we have in common. The only ones that are really affected by the building being this way

are the Diamonds. They can't slip through walls anymore," he answered patiently and I nodded.

I felt a soft tug on my vest and I looked down at Kyle.

"We have to talk," he said seriously holding Mr. Valentine in a death grip and I nodded.

"Keep the customers happy," I called behind me as the little boy dragged me away. We ended up in the pool area where it appears the Major kids haven't decided on visiting yet.

"What's up?" I asked looking at him and he motioned for someone to come out of the shadows. Mr. Withers approached us carefully and I could tell that this wasn't going to be good news.

"What happened?" I demanded alarmed and sat down slowly onto one of the metal chairs.

"We have bad news," Mr. Withers said carefully, ignoring my anxiety.

"You have to promise not to hate us," Kyle agreed quietly and I frowned.

"I wouldn't hate you," I informed him and he looked up at me unhappily.

"You might after this," he told me his bottom lip quivering.

"What's the news?" I asked distressed. "Did someone die or something?"

"No," the small kid said and suddenly hugged me.

"Victory has another dove," Mr. Withers spoke at last and I eyeballed him incredulously.

"What?" I whispered bewildered and he scowled at the wall. He was usually so calm and careful when saying something but now he was uncomfortable, weary.

"Victory has another dove," he repeated and my arms tightened around Kyle.

"How did this happen?" I mumbled and the older man sat across from me.

"It appears that he was looking for a woman named Elizabeth and he found her," he began.

"He found Elizabeth?" I gasped shocked. Not something I wanted to hear at all.

"She's the Jane of Diamonds. At first he thought it was you but then when you didn't display certain traits that were in her character he knew he got it wrong," he spoke softly as if to soften the blow that it would have on me.

"Go on," I beseeched him wanting to know everything even if it hurt.

"He didn't think he would have found her in the Royal. He was content to have you but when he found her he just...he just snapped and asked her straight out to be his Dove. He talked to Major about all of this before he made his decision." With that, I started to cry.

Author's note: Sorry this took so long but I'm posting more chapters today so don't worry! :D

Chapter 23

King of Hearts Ch. 23

I was in front of the swimming pool. It looked oddly comforting in the current insanity of my life. After being told that Jack had gotten another dove, I started to cry. During this, I sent both of the messengers out and stripped down to my underwear which changed easily into a swimsuit. It didn't make sense to me why he didn't tell me but I wasn't really worried about that at the moment. I was more concerned with not drowning in my emotions. I dived deep into the cool water but I didn't feel anything but a light resistance to my invading body. I landed with a gentle thump on the bottom and I sat there covered by water, trying to lose myself in the

soft push and pull of the currents that my body had made. This was my way of taking control. By losing it and the taking it back. I needed control, if I didn't have it I'd be a mess. I could handle things with control. Even if Jack got another dove, I could take it.

It didn't take long to run out of air. Springing out of the water, I pushed my way up to the surface. Gasping for breath, I swam to the side of the pool and pulled myself out. Collapsing on the floor, I stared up at the ceiling. I had it back but I still felt terrible, a feeling that I knew all too well. Georgia had pounded it into my system when I was living with her. I laid there for a long time, time that seemed to slip by me as I wondered what I was going to do now. It was around then that a face appeared over mine and I pondered whether it was a hallucination or not. It was the face of a late twenties man who seemed to be interested in why I was laying on the ground. A cross shaped scar ran diagonally across his face and meet on the bridge of his nose. The glittering green eyes seemed curious but he didn't actually say anything from underneath his short crimson hair. We stayed like that, my apparition and me, until I finally sat up

and stared down at the water. I was sure it was only my mind tricking me but when he sat down next to me, I realized that I had been found. He didn't speak though. He just sat there as if waiting for me to talk about whatever I wanted to. In the end, I did. I told him everything. From the beginning of this mess to the moment that was ticking by and he listen. The man never interrupted and he never changed expressions. It was nice to just talk to someone who seemed more interested in what you had to say then talking about something else. As I finished my life's story, a warm silence settled over us and I basked in it. Finally, I looked over at him expectantly.

"Who are you?" I questioned curiously and he blinked. One of the few movements I had seen him make. It wasn't that he didn't move, he just didn't move unnecessarily.

"Aiden," he answered in a voice that sounded like it hadn't been used in a while.

"Why are you here?" I asked hoping I wasn't being too bothersome. He seemed fragile in such a huge body as his.

"I'm the Jack of Hearts. I came here because you needed me," he explained calmly and I looked around. I didn't see Erin or Kieran anywhere.

"Where are the two that found you?" I implored curious and he shrugged.

"No one found me. I picked up one your wave length and I came here. You seemed sad," He told me and I searched his face for any hint of a lie. I didn't find any.

Reaching out with my mind, I looked for Erin's thoughts and found it in New York.

"Hey are you..." I started to think to them but I was cut off.

"Sorry, Ms. Towers but I can't talk now. Kinda busy," she replied quickly and the link shut down.

"Well...that was strange," I said to no one in particular and turned to the Jack. He looked at me questioningly.

"I was cut off. It seems they're too busy to talk to me," I informed him and he nodded. "I should probably

get you your room key." The thought got me up and we went to the receptionist desk. On the way, my swimsuit changed back to my uniform and I arrived looking pretty much how I left. Nil was in the same spot as he left and he looked up at my entrance.

"Mr. Victory's joined the Ace of Clubs," he said bluntly and I took a deep breath.

"Thanks," I replied and leaned over to get Aiden's keycard. It somehow didn't bother me as much as I thought it would if this had happened before. I guess it's because someone was there to listen. He accepted the card with little fuss and put it in his pocket. It was around that moment that I noticed that he didn't have anything with him.

"Where's all your stuff?" I asked blankly.

"A fire," was his only reply and I nodded. A fire burned his things. Terrible but it could happen.

"I'll take the next shift after my shower," I told Nil and he acknowledged what I said with a simple nod.

The shower I took had to be up in the top ten best showers I had ever taken in my life. The scene after I had gotten out of the shower was weird though.

"Darn it! I forgot my towel," I muttered opening the curtain as I remembered and a hand tapped me on the shoulder. Shocked, I whirled around to find Aiden with a hand over his eyes holding out a towel.

"You forgot this," he muttered and I grabbed the towel and quickly wrapped it around me. As I did that he tried to get out of the bathroom without hurting himself. THUMP. A soft hiss let me know that he had failed. THUMP! The next soft hiss was followed by the opening of the door and I watched him leave with the hand still over his eyes. It was funny in too many ways. Chuckling, I stopped and looked at myself in the mirror. I looked happy. How could I be happy? I had just been told that my dove had cheated on me! What kind of response was this? Frowning, I examined my face in the mirror and shook my head. The jerk didn't deserve to be thought about. Putting on my clothes, I came out of the bathroom to see Aiden nursing his head and Fido at

his feet whining. Putting my uncombed hair in a ponytail, I went over to him and sat on my wood coffee table.

"Let me look at it," I told him pushing his hands aside and looked at the bump on his forehead. It wasn't too big but it was bleeding. Grabbing my first aid kit from the bathroom, I returned and started cleaning up his wound. As I finished, I noticed how he had a ton of other little scars all over his face and hands. Picking them up, I examined them for any other kind of deformities. I couldn't see any but I still looked up at him with concern.

"How did you get these?" I asked him.

"Work," he said simply and I frowned at his completely evasive answer.

"You're just not one for talk are you?" I mumbled under my breath and he shrugged. I took his answer to mean no and got up to go down to the lobby. He grabbed my elbow and handed me something. Glancing at him, I stared down at my closed palm and opened it. A single candy lay inside and I waited for him to explain what it was.

"A candy. Women like to eat chocolate when they're upset," he gestured for me to eat it and I smiled at him.

"Not all women like to eat chocolate you know," I pointed out and a panicked look came on his face. "Don't worry, I do." Relief did an interesting trick to his face. His little scars seemed to vanish but the cross seemed to stay intact.

The days passed quickly and I soon found out that I had a follower. By a follower I mean Aiden followed me around everywhere. He didn't talk much but he did like to play with Fido who trailed behind him happily. He seemed more taken by the dog than I was which is saying something. He didn't trust most of the people I was around but oddly enough he seemed to be fast friends with Nil. It may be a bit odd for a thirty year old to follow someone around but he didn't look old. He looked lost. He seemed to be stuck in the twenties and had no idea where the thirties were. That and the fact that he wore silk button down shirts and black slacks exclusively. When I asked him where the clothes come from he was

vague but he did say that he borrowed them from someone. His skin strangely enough never tanned. It would burn but it wouldn't tan. To keep him from getting too burned, I decided to stay indoors most of the time but he went out sometimes anyway to play with the rock dog, which was sweet if you understood how that helped the poor pooch get some of that energy out. I ended up accompanying them and watched them as they played. Usually Nil would take a break and come out with us around that time.

"Does he play chess?" he asked me one afternoon. Aiden seemed to have an odd respect for the ace and addressed him as "sir".

"Ask him," I shrugged and he nodded thoughtfully.

"Aiden!" he called out to the active man and he walked over.

"Yes sir?" He asked and Nil looked at him earnestly.

"Do you play chess?" He questioned seriously and the older man blinked.

"Yes sir," he replied.

"For how long?" he interrogated and I had a mildly bad feeling about this.

"Around fifteen years, sir," he answered and the younger boy sprang up. A few seconds later he was back, with a chess table and a chair. Aiden took the chess table and Nil opened the chair. They sat down facing each other and I looked amused from one to the other. The men looked so determined that I wondered if I should be there at all. When I got up to leave however, Aiden caught my sleeve and gazed at me. Getting the point, I sat back down and watched as the game commenced. That game was probably the longest one I had ever seen in my life...Although my life wasn't very long and I had never watched chess before this match so it would be more appropriate to say that it was the first chess match I had ever watched in my life. Nil had seemed shocked at how well Aiden played and Aiden was just happy to be able to play. Well he seemed happy; he didn't exactly say anything until Nil won.

"Checkmate," Nil practically sighed and his opponent nodded.

"That was a good game sir. I liked how you thwarted my attacks at every turn. It was nice to play with someone so serious, sir," Aiden complimented him and the Spade looked at the Heart.

"Are you mocking me?" he asked angrily and the Royal blinked.

"Not at all sir. I was being serious. You seemed to know my every move," he frowned and I stifled a laugh.

"I was trying to lose!" Nil shouted angrily and glared at his rival.

"Oh...I'm sorry sir," Aiden said looking mildly abashed and motioned for him to sit back down. "Here let's play again so that you can lose sir..." Nil didn't take that very well but he sat down anyway and that started up an entire chess tournament between the two men. It appears that whenever Nil tried to lose Aiden would lose instead and when Nil tried to win, Aiden won. It was a complete mismatch of a series and by the end of it Nil went to go, completely defeated, to his room.

"Did you have fun?" I asked Aiden afterwards and he nodded grinning.

"I didn't think that he would be so good," He said happily and I smiled at his cheerfulness.

"You seem upbeat for someone who just lost," I told him and he shook his head.

"I was trying to lose. Losing is harder than winning. It takes the wind out of your sails and you have to deal with the fact that you lost. It's just something that you have to go through," he replied and I stared at him wondering just how old he was. With that he stood back up and stretched. It seemed like he was amazingly happy to just get up and move because he started playing with Fido afterwards.

"Mina!" I heard Erin call and I looked over at the girl running towards me.

"Hey, Erin! What's up? Why didn't you get back before now?" I asked curious as to her delayed return.

"What are you talking about? We were getting the Jack of Hearts," She said confused and I looked over at Aiden.

"Isn't he the Jack?" I questioned jabbing my thumb at the guy playing with the rock dog.

"No but what is that?" She claimed and gazed at the dog in confusion.

"It's a rock dog. Are you sure that's not the Jack of Hearts?" I repeated and she nodded.

"Yeah because Kieran has the Jack with him," she told me.

"Go get them," I ordered tightly and she ran off. After a few moments she came back with Kieran and another boy a little bit older than Kyle.

"Hello," I said calmly to the boy and he stared at me.

"Hi," he responded nervously.

"Who are you?" I asked staying calm.

"My name is Mark," he replied looking confused.

"Really? Are you getting bad headaches?" I investigated.

"Yeah. They get really bad and then I have to go take some medicine that my mom said would help me focus on my schoolwork," he nodded and I leaned back against the bench.

"What's wrong?" Kieran asked for the first time and I looked over at Aiden playing with Fido.

"Does he seem like he could hurt anyone?" I asked them and the two exchanged a glance and looked from Aiden to me.

"Did he hurt someone?" The Heart asked and I gazed at him thoughtfully.

"I don't know," I answered truthfully.

"He doesn't look violent," The piano player offered.

"He looks more like the playful type," the dancer agreed and Aiden walked over.

"How did you get that scar?" Erin asked and he stared at her.

"War," he was back to monosyllables.

"Aiden," I said grimly and he turned to me. "Who are you?" A grim line set on his mouth as he noticed that his time was up and he said, "I'm the Ace of Clubs."

Author's note: Well everyone...our time together on this story is almost up. Thanks for your support and don't forget to vote! :D

Chapter 24

King of Hearts Ch. 24

"Ace of Clubs?" I repeated his confession shocked. He didn't confirm it. Instead he stared at me in silence, challenging me with his wordless stare. Wiping my hand across my face, I turned away from him and looked at the almost empty doorway. Nil stood there staring at the five of us in astonishment.

"You're the Ace of Clubs?" he said in a whisper and with slow deliberate movements walked over to Aiden. "Why did you kill him?" Surprise ran across the older man's face and he shook his head.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he answered and Nil's fists clenched, ready to hit something.

"My father was found with an Ace of Clubs on his dashboard! Why!" Nil lost control and pushed him against the wall. I couldn't blame him. If my father was murdered I'd go after the murderer too.

"I didn't kill him. Did you ever see the body?" The defending Ace asked and the boy scowled at him.

"No but it was a closed casket ceremony," he retorted letting the man go and backing away.

"Did your mother ever go and identify the body?" asked Aiden.

"No but they said they identified him by his dental records," Nil rebutted and I shook my head.

"They're demanded by protocol to have someone identify the body," I frowned now interested in the confusion.

"You're saying my father's not..." Nil choked up unable to say the remaining word.

"Dead? I never was," a calm, gentle voice said from behind him and we all whirled around to face Sakura, Montgomery, and the King of Spades.

"Dad?" The question was barely audible but the emotions were clear on his face. He couldn't believe that his father was really alive.

"Sorry, we're late. You hid him really well," Sakura told Aiden and I glanced over at him.

"Zekan was trying to kill him. He knew about the Royal Creation process. He was the one that Major ran to for advice on what to do with Zekan," the male Club said to the higher Spade and Nil continued staring at his father unbelieving.

"You're alive," was all he was able to say and the older Spade smiled at him.

"I am," he agreed. "But you need to focus on the problem at hand."

"What problem?" I demanded impatiently.

"When Jackson came to me, he and Shelia had been talking about making a new generation of Royals,

ones that would do their bidding. Shelia had promised him co-power with her. Jack was going to help them with it by bringing them a sacrifice..." Nil's father drifted off and I rubbed my nose.

"We need to stop them," I stated the obvious and they nodded.

"Yeah but what are we going to do?" Erin questioned and I looked to her.

"Leave," I said looking at everyone excepting Nil, his dad, Aiden, and me. They did leave but not happily. I didn't need unknowing hands in this.

"How do you know that Major ran to Nil's dad?" I questioned patiently.

"Philip," the man interjected and I nodded to him. Suddenly Nil hugged his dad and his father clutched him to him tightly. After a few seconds Nil pulled back and took a deep breath.

"I'm okay now," he reported and I nodded. I was mildly surprised that he hadn't done that before.

"How do you know all of this?" Nil asked impatiently.

"I was in the team that made Zekan. We wanted to make a legend in the Royals and we did...just not in the way we hoped. Well, I hoped. Shelia wanted power and Major wanted money," he shrugged.

"And Jack?" I said and he shook his head.

"He wanted to find a way to get Elizabeth back," He muttered and I sat on the bench slowly. So it was Elizabeth. Rage flamed up then sputtered back down as I controlled it and I stood back up. Time to make a plan.

"You said that they needed sacrifices. How many would they need to make a new generation?" I asked serious and he nodded.

"They would need around three of the higher Royals but if they had an Ace..." He trailed off and I gapped at him.

"Shelia's going to kill Jack?" I realized and took another deep breath.

"It's likely," Aiden admitted.

"We have to stop them...how many people would they make?"

"Lesser ones? Around forty give or take."

"And how do they...sacrifice them?"

"Kill them. The best method is melting off their faces. It keeps the power outlet intact," he described and I felt sick to my stomach. Not that I was squeamish but because I might have to witness it.

"And Jack's going to be one of them...We have to save him. He is still my dove," I decided and the group nodded. They expected that.

"Do you have any idea where they are?" I said to the newly known Ace.

"It would probably be the last place we performed the first ritual. Shelia's big on tradition," he informed me.

"What...where's Jackson? You said he become King of the next generation or something right?" I asked turning to Nil and he shook his head.

"I checked already. Erin contacted me and told me that he was gone. We can't find him anywhere," He told me and I took the deepest breath yet.

"Aiden, you're with me. You two stay here and reunite. I don't need to take father and son away from each other again," I ordered them and Nil scowled at me.

"No way! I have to come! What would happen if you didn't have me?" He protested angrily.

"You'll live. That's what. If I die, it's up to you to gather up the next generation and manage them. I'm making you the new King of Cards while I'm away," I stopped him and he glared at me. He knew he couldn't do anything though. If he went against me, he wouldn't have any choice but to go to Shelia and he hates her as much as I do.

"Fine," he gave up and stalked back into the hotel. Philip shook my hand solemnly and went after his son.

"Are you really going to do this?" Aiden asked and I took his hand. It engulfed mine.

"I have to. If I don't I'll have a bigger problem on my hands," I mumbled and gently touched his mind. He didn't push me away but invited me in and I looked around for the location in his brain. He seemed to put it in front of me as I searched for it and I retreated back to my own thoughts. Embracing the image, I transported us to the destination.

"You aren't supposed to be able to do that. You neutralized those grounds," Aiden informed me when we arrived.

"I'm the Queen of the Cards. I can do what's in the limits of my powers and the rules," I replied and looked around. We had appeared in a pure white room without furniture, flooring, or even wallpaper. The room looked empty. There wasn't even a window but there was a door.

"Have you been here before?" I said gesturing towards the colorless room.

"Yes," was the answer I got and I shrugged. No need for a long history I guess. Heading towards the door, I opened it and came into a hallway. It was an extremely normal hallway with the walls painted a

neutral color and paintings that weren't worth anything hung on the walls. Souvenirs lined up under the pictures and I saw many from different places around the world. It felt too normal, too safe. There were a ton of doorways leading to different rooms, a bathroom, a bedroom, the kitchen.

"Where would they be?" I questioned him and he led the way to the fifth door on the left. He did remember.

"Here, we took the sacrifice in here," He whispered touching the door with old familiarity. Then with a strong, swift, determined movement he tore open the door.

"Jack," I said grimly as I saw his back leaning relaxed in the chair. "Do you know how much trouble I went for you! And for you to cheat on me like...oh god." The last words came out as a gasp as I looked on the face of my former dove. It was grotesquely changed in such a way that the only way I could've told it was Jack from his back. I felt Aiden's hands grip my shoulders and turn me away only to face yet another horror. A woman, who I presumed to be the Jane of

Diamonds, was strewn around the floor, in parts. Blood caressed the floor like a lover as it slowly dripped from numerous body parts and I didn't realize that I was crying until the older man took me by the arms and practically dragged me out of the room.

"Look at me, Mina," he said softly shaking me. "Mina! FOCUS!" His hand slapped my face making my mind react to the physical pain instead of the emotional scarring. Blinking, I stared at him and he searched my face for hysterics.

"I'm not going to freak out again," I choked sobbing and he pulled me to him.

"Then cry. Shelia can wait," he told me and I pulled away.

"I can't. If we wait too long then Major might be next," I declined and wiped my eyes on his offered handkerchief. Handing it back, I took a series of deep breaths that seem to help me in all the better ways. Taking such a deep breath I choked, I abandoned the self help and stood up straight. Grief could wait until later. Now was the time for action, to be cliché.

"Where's the other room for the actual recreation?" I asked numbing myself and he frowned at me.

"Are you really okay?" He avoided the question.

"No but show me anyway," I replied shortly. He nodded and sighed. Leading the way through the disgustingly normal hallway, He stopped at the last door on the right and looked over at me.

"This is the door. Are you sure you want to go in? You might not want to see what's behind that door," he said reluctantly and I turned to him.

"Why are you protesting?" I questioned and he shook his head.

"The process in horrific and disturbing," he responded bluntly.

"Good. Then maybe I'll get to see Shelia die," I spat and pushed past him into the room.

Aiden was right when he said it was disturbing. When I opened the door, I saw Jackson Major and Shelia fighting it out. They moved around in the deadly dance and I noticed that Major was defending

himself. As they fought, I gathered in as much information as I could. I didn't know if Major would win or not but if I distracted him then he would get killed. Not something that I wanted for the moment. Aiden took my arm and tried to pull me outside but I didn't budge. I needed to see what happened. Plus, the spiral in the middle of the room had caught my attention. It seemed to made of consecutive numbers on the inside of the circle and then before each number there was a sign. Differing with each section of the spiral into the middle where the letters and signs got too small to see, I went forward and knelt by it.

"Don't touch it," the Ace hissed snatching my reaching hand out of the air.

"Ms. Towers? What are you...?" Major never got to finish his sentence. Just as I looked up, Shelia put her hand on his distracted face and she slowly started to squeeze. To my complete and utter horror, his face started to slowly melt off. His screams ricocheted off the walls and I gripped Aiden's arm supportively unable to do anything. Oddly enough, Aiden didn't do

anything but draw me back against the wall and shielded me from the view. I heard Major's body land with a loud thud and I gasped. I came out from behind him to see Shelia land on the ground. She didn't seem to notice us and she pulled something out of her pockets. Three globes shimmered hopelessly and she smiled at them adoringly. Aiden once again gripped my arm from distracting her and I looked up at him.

"Don't. You distract her now and you'll kill all of us," he hissed and I turned back to the woman. Holding out the globes with a smile, she thrust them straight into her body. Almost immediately she fell to the floor with a gasp and she slowly crawled to the center of the spiral. Once again, I tried to get to her and the Ace stopped me. So I stayed back.

He was right to stop me. The moment that I would have gotten to the floor design it started glowing and Shelia started shrieking. Blood seemed to pour from every orifice and soon it flooded the floor with its droplets. It seemed to go on forever and the red liquid even seemed to reach for me as it spread out

and I took a step back. My attention was once again caught on the spiral as the signs and numbers flew up into the air in pairs and flew in every direction. When every one of them was gone, the glowing and screaming stopped. Shelia's motionless body was slumped on the floor and it looked like something out of a bad terror film that seemed all too real.

"Let's go. No human or Royal would be able to handle that much power without killing themselves," Aiden briefed me and I glanced up at him.

"How do you know?" I questioned going towards the seemingly dead woman.

"That's how Ace of Diamond's dad died. He was one of the original people in Zekan's creation," he said quietly and I stared at him.

"You killed Kyle's father?" I said shocked and he put a hand through his hair.

"I didn't kill his father. His father just grabbed the orb and held it close to him and it was absorbed into him by pure accident. None of us knew what was going to happen," he replied and I continued to stare at him.

"And the spiral?" I whispered and his hand touched the scar gingerly.

"It's my own personal punishment for trying to save him," the older man said regretfully and I continued to stare at him.

"I didn't mean for this to happen," he mumbled and caught me when I fainted.

Author's note: sorry for it being so late...don't forget to comment and vote! Thanks for thesupport!

Chapter 25

King of Hearts Epilogue

I woke up in my bed sleepy and hoping that the day before was a dream. When I got out of bed and felt the stiffness of the bottom of my jeans I looked down and saw that there was dried blood on my pants. Shocked, I ripped the pants off and ran to the bathroom for a shower. It wasn't the best shower I had ever had but it wasn't the worst either. It didn't do anything to help my dark thoughts but it did help my clean feeling. As I threw on some clean clothes, I tied my hair in a ponytail and went to greet the sun from my window. I was disappointed. Night had just fallen and Major's family was out by the pool playing. Grief engulfed my system and I sat heavily on a

nearby chair watching them. They seemed so innocent and carefree. How was I supposed to tell them that he was dead? They were all dead...

Aiden crept into the room and knelt before me in a huddled heap.

"I'm glad you're awake. Do you forgive me?" he begged staring deliberately at the floor.

"You didn't do anything," I pointed out and he glared at a seemingly offensive part on the ground.

"Exactly. I wasn't able to help out with anything. I wasn't even able to stop Shelia from killing Major or your dove. For that I have to apologize," he confessed and I sighed.

"It's fine. I wasn't able to do anything either. What's done is done. We need to look for those numbers first and then I'll see what I'm going to do after that," I waved away his grievances and he stood up beside me. His confusion was written clearly on his face and I patted his hand gently.

"Don't worry about it she's..." The word that I was dying to say never came out because Dorothy plowed into the room with a bouquet of roses in her hands.

"How can you explain this?" She demanded and I took the card that was hidden beneath the leaves. Opening it up, I stared in pure shock at the design.

"What's wrong?" She asked nervously and I silently handed the card to her.

"She's not dead," I answered simply.

Author's note: Well...I'm done with this book...now on to the NEXT! Watch out for "Ace of Clubs"! :D Don't forget to vote and comment! :D I love you people! Free cookies for all!

About the Author

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